

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM J. MOORE

Interviewee: William J. Moore

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Description

William J. Moore, Jr., was born in Lane City, Texas, on July 17, 1913. Within the year his family moved to Oklahoma where Moore was educated. Voted most likely to succeed by his classmates, he was graduated from Oklahoma A & M with a degree in architecture.

The young architect was more fortunate than many graduates during the Great Depression. While still attending school he had become associated with his uncles in the theater business. The Griffith brothers operated a large theater chain in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri and New Mexico, and Moore became their architect and builder. This experience and his training in architecture prepared him well for the leading role he was to play in the development of Las Vegas's second gaming district along the old Los Angeles highway, the now-famous Strip.

Moore and his uncle, R. E. Griffith, headed for Los Angeles in early 1941. There they heard good things about the development of tourism in Las Vegas, Nevada. They decided to stop in southern Nevada to see for themselves. Moore remembered, "We came to Las Vegas and found that the opportunities were fabulous." Griffith bought property for development on the old Los Angeles highway just south of the Las Vegas townsite. Moore and his colleague, Jack Corgan, did final drawings for the hotel in Dallas and then, in December 1941, Moore moved to Las Vegas to supervise construction of the Last Frontier Hotel.

December 10, 1942 marked the grand opening of the Last Frontier hotel on what was to become Las Vegas's second gaming district, the Strip. A few months earlier the El Rancho Hotel had been built on the highway by Tommy Hull, and many people thought the choice of a location so far out of town was foolhardy and doomed the hotel to failure. Thus, the establishment of the Last Frontier was Moore's and Griffith's vote of confidence in the El Rancho's location and in the economy of the community.

During World War II procuring building materials for non-essential building was not easy. The challenge only sharpened Moore's powers of imagination and innovation. In desperate need of wiring and conduit, he purchased a Pioche mine and salvaged all its wiring, conduit and switches for use in the Last Frontier. To ensure a supply of meat and dairy products for the hotel's dining room, he purchased two Moapa ranches and stocked them with prize beef and dairy herds.

Moore was a promoter. To attract Californians he instituted junkets, first by bus and then by plane. Rodeos and roping contests were regular Sunday afternoon events for visitors and locals. Through contacts he had made with the theater chain, he was able to bring Hollywood and entertainment personalities to the stage of the Ramona Room. Probably Moore's most successful promotion was the creation of the Last Frontier Village, a collection of old buildings salvaged from Nevada and California and some replicas of Old West buildings.

(Continued on next page.)

Description (continued)

The grand opening of the Last Frontier honored officers from the Nellis Air Force gunnery school and military camps in California and Arizona, and funds were raised to benefit army recreation centers and camps. Moore was twice elected president of the Chamber of Commerce. His reputation for honesty and integrity made it possible for Governor Vail Pittman to appoint him to the Nevada State Tax Commission despite Moore's personal involvement in the gaming industry. He set high standards for the industry and was influential in developing state gaming rules and procedures. In 1955 he was a principal witness in the Kefauver Crime Commission hearings in Las Vegas.

After the sale of the Last Frontier in 1951, Moore and his business associates developed the El Cortez and Showboat hotel-casinos. He also invested in real estate and oil, and he helped develop the potato industry in Winnemucca.

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THIS ORAL HISTORY WAS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART BY GIFTS FROM:
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An Oral History Conducted by Elizabeth Nelson Patrick
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University of Nevada Oral History Program

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CONTENTS

Preface to the Digital Edition	ix
Original Preface	xi
Introduction	xiii
An Interview with William J. Moore	1
Notes	47
Photographs	49
Original Index: For Reference Only	53

PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP) engages in systematic interviewing of persons who can provide firsthand descriptions of events, people and places that give history its substance. The products of this research are the tapes of the interviews and their transcriptions.

In themselves, oral history interviews are not history. However, they often contain valuable primary source material, as useful in the process of historiographical synthesization as the written sources to which historians have customarily turned. Verifying the accuracy of all of the statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the OHP's operating budget permits. The program can vouch that the statements were made, but it cannot attest that they are free of error. Accordingly, oral histories should be read with the same prudence that the reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries and other sources of historical information.

It is the policy of the OHP to produce transcripts that are as close to verbatim

as possible, but some alteration of the text is generally both unavoidable and desirable. When human speech is captured in print the result can be a morass of tangled syntax, false starts and incomplete sentences, sometimes verging on incoherency. The type font contains no symbols for the physical gestures and the diverse vocal modulations that are integral parts of communication through speech. Experience shows that totally verbatim transcripts are often totally unreadable and therefore a total waste of the resources expended in their production. While keeping alterations to a minimum the OHP will, in preparing a text:

- a. generally delete false starts, redundancies and the uhs, ahs and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled;

- b. occasionally compress language that would be confusing to the reader in unaltered form;

- c. rarely shift a portion of a transcript to place it in its proper context; and

- d. enclose in [brackets] explanatory information or words that were not uttered

but have been added to render the text intelligible.

There will be readers who prefer to take their oral history straight, without even the minimal editing that occurred in the production of this text; they are directed to the tape recording.

Copies of all or part of this work and the tape recording from which it is derived are available from:

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INTRODUCTION

William J. Moore, Jr., was born in Lane City, Texas, 17 July 1913. Within the year his family moved to Oklahoma where Moore was educated. Voted most likely to succeed by his classmates, he was graduated from Oklahoma A & M (now Oklahoma State University) with a degree in architecture.

The young architect was more fortunate than many graduates during the Great Depression. While still attending school he had become associated with his uncles in the theater business. The Griffith brothers operated a large theater chain in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri and New Mexico, and upon graduation Moore became their architect and builder. His theater business experience and training in architecture prepared him well for the leading role he was to play in the development of Las Vegas's second gaming district along the old Los Angeles highway, the now-famous Strip.

When William Moore and his uncle R. E. Griffith headed for Los Angeles in early 1941, their main concern was development of a large hotel and theater in Deming, New Mexico.

In Los Angeles Moore and Griffith heard some good things about the development of tourism in Las Vegas, Nevada. On their way back to corporate headquarters in Dallas they decided to stop over in southern Nevada to see for themselves. Moore remembered, "We came to Las Vegas and found that the opportunities were fabulous."

Plans for the Deming project were dropped immediately, and Griffith bought property for development on the old Los Angeles highway just south of the Las Vegas townsite. Moore and his colleague Jack Corgan did final drawings for the hotel in Dallas and then, in December 1941, Moore moved to Las Vegas to supervise construction of the hotel.

An important day for Las Vegas was 10 December 1942. It marked the grand opening of the Last Frontier Hotel on what was to become Las Vegas's second gaming district, the Strip. It is rare that being second is as important as being first in any endeavor, but such was the case for the Last Frontier Hotel. A few months earlier the El Rancho Hotel had

been built on the highway by Tommy Hull, and many town folk thought the choice of a location so far out of town was nothing but foolhardy and doomed the hotel to failure. Thus the establishment of the Last Frontier on the highway was William J. Moore's and R. E. Griffith's vote of confidence in the El Rancho's location and in the economy of the community, and it demonstrated their faith in the national purpose.

The country was engaged in a two-front war, and procuring building materials for non-essential building was not easy. The challenge only sharpened Moore's powers of imagination and innovation. At one point, in desperate need of wiring and conduit, he purchased a Pioche mine and salvaged all its wiring, conduit and switches for use in the Last Frontier. To ensure a supply of meat and dairy products for the hotel's dining room, he purchased two Moapa ranches and stocked them with prize beef and dairy herds.

Moore was a promoter. To attract Californians he instituted junkets, first by bus and then by plane. Rodeos and roping contests were regular Sunday afternoon events for visitors and local people alike. Through contacts he had made with the theater chain, he was able to bring Hollywood and entertainment personalities to the stage of the Ramona Room. Probably Moore's most successful promotion was the creation of the Last Frontier Village, a collection of old buildings Doby Doc (Robert Caudill) had gathered from around Nevada and California and some replicas of Old West buildings. Melodramas were presented in the Bird Cage Theater.

The grand opening of the Last Frontier honored officers from the local gunnery school and other neighboring military camps in California and Arizona, and funds were raised to benefit army recreation centers and

camps. The affair was typical of Moore's interest in community life. He was twice elected president of the Chamber of Commerce. His reputation for honesty and integrity made it possible for Governor Vail Pittman to appoint him to the State Tax Commission despite Moore's personal involvement in the gaming industry at the time. On the Tax Commission he set high standards for the industry and was influential in developing state gaming rules and procedures. In 1955 he was principal witness in the Kefauver Crime Commission hearings in Las Vegas.

After the sale of the Last Frontier in 1951, Moore and other business associates developed the El Cortez and Showboat hotel-casinos. Additionally, he invested in real estate and oil. Winnemucca potato farmers can thank him for developing their industry.

It was a lucky day, that day back in 1941, when Bill Moore decided that there was some future for him in Las Vegas—lucky for Moore and for the town. Perhaps journalist and historian Florence Lee Cahlan put it best when she said of Bill Moore, "His was one of the most lively minds I have ever encountered. He did more for this town than anyone I know. On a personal level, he [was] a dedicated husband and father.

William Moore was a cooperative and enthusiastic informant even though at the time of his interviews he was terminally ill. This transcription represents about four and one-half hours of taping. The first session on 5 May 1981 ended prematurely when Moore became too exhausted to continue. It was thought that he might not be able to finish the tapings. A second session took place on 29 August 1981. This collector remembers with great pleasure how Bill Moore "got on a roll" that day. After we had gone through the two cassettes I had brought with me, I apologized because I could not continue the

interview for lack of another cassette. I had not expected that he would be able to tape for more than two hours! I shall never forget how he bounded out of his chair and searched for one of his own blank cassettes so that we could continue a reminiscence we both found stimulating.

The interviews explore Moore's business experience in gaming and hotel management and his community involvement and dedication. They document his role as a mover and a shaker in the pre-corporate development of Las Vegas gaming. This oral history is part of a series of oral histories, Pioneer Tapes, taped by Elizabeth Nelson Patrick and funded by a grant from the Nevada Humanities Committee. The original tapes are on deposit in the Special Collections Department, Dickinson Library, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

William J. Moore, Jr., died on 4 June 1982. After his death his widow, Patricia, and their three children deposited photographs, maps, architectural drawings (among them original plans of the Last Frontier Hotel) memorabilia and a scrapbook in the Special Collections Department of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Elizabeth Nelson Patrick
Special Collections Department
Dickinson Library
University of Nevada Las Vegas



WILLIAM J. MOORE
1945

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM J. MOORE

William Moore: I was born in Lane City, Texas, but I was educated in what then was Oklahoma A & M, which is now Oklahoma State University, as an architect.

Elizabeth Nelson Patrick: How did that get you to Las Vegas?

I was commissioned to design and build the Hotel Last Frontier in Las Vegas by R. B. Griffith, who was my uncle and the principal in a theater chain in Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arkansas.

Did you work for that chain?

As an architect.

How did you know about Las Vegas? The Strip did not exist at that time. How did you become involved here?

Well, Mr. Griffith owned a hotel in Gallup, New Mexico, called the Hotel El Rancho, which I had been partially involved in along

with an architect out of Dallas by the name of Dilbeck. Mr. Griffith wanted to build an additional hotel—having in mind a chain of hotels—and asked me to meet him and go with him to Deming, New Mexico. Deming was on a national, well-traveled highway [and] had during the First World War some hundred thousand troops at all times as a port of embarkation. And the reason for him knowing about Deming is that, at one time, there had been approximately 30 theaters in the town.

I know Deming now, and that surprises me. I didn't realize that.

Many of the theaters still existed in buildings, and approximately 12 of them were still standing with all the original equipment. So he accomplished 2 things in Deming. Mr. Griffith wanted to commission me to make a deal with the people that owned the theaters and take the theaters over, as well as buy all the existing theaters and remodel same into store buildings, such that they would not be

converted into a theater structure. That, and the possible location of building another western-type hotel which would go in with a chain of hotels he intended to name Hotel El Rancho. We went to Deming; made the deal with the theater people.

In the meantime I'd heard about the activity and possible future activity in Las Vegas, Nevada, it being further west and on cross-country highways with the gambling as an added inducement. We later went to Los Angeles, talked with various and sundry suppliers—for the possible construction in Deming of the theaters—and the hotel people concerning the opportunities in Las Vegas. The recommendation was real strong on Las Vegas. In the opinion of the hotel people, [it] was far superior for a hotel location than Deming, New Mexico.

*Now the comparison is laughable, isn't it?
[laughter]*

Yes, it is. At that particular time we came to Las Vegas, examined the various opportunities on the purchase of property, found that Mr. [Tom] Hull of the Hull hotel chain had, prior to us arriving, constructed and opened a hotel under the name of the Hotel El Rancho. Our reservation for our stay in Las Vegas had been made by the Hull hotel people in the El Rancho out of the Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles.

We came to Las Vegas and found that the opportunities were fabulous. It did present a problem in that the opportunities, we felt, were quite some time in the future, as they would have been also in Deming, New Mexico. And the hotel that Mr. Hull had opened under the name of Hotel El Rancho was of a western-type design; while not exactly similar to designs that Griffith had in mind, they interfered with his planned

method of promotion. He couldn't use the name El Rancho. So the name [Last Frontier] was thought up by Mr. Griffith, and he also came up with a slogan which we always thought a very good one: The Early West in Modern Splendor.

We had to bear in mind that a lot of promotion was going to have to be done, which we were familiar with because of the theater operation. Even as a youngster I ran numerous promotions for the theater chain, because my mother, being a Griffith originally, was operating the theaters that were owned by she and her brother in the town of Fairfax, Oklahoma.

During the time I was going to school, [on] numerous occasions the Griffiths, recognizing my promotional ability, had commissioned me to design and build theaters even though I did not have, at that time, a license. The only way that it could be done was through a registered architect, which I would commission myself and work through. Here's an illustration: I built a theater in Seminole, Oklahoma, in approximately 30 days... 750 seat theater. The night that the theater opened, due to an unfortunate happening in the projection booth, the theater caught fire and burned to the ground. So they commissioned me to rebuild the thing, and we did so in approximately 3 days sooner than we had originally built the other, even in spite of the fact that we had to tear out the old rubble of the theater and reconstruct from the ground up. We did have the advantage of having the foundation that wasn't damaged by the fire.

So you were experienced in building by the time your uncle decided upon building the Last Frontier?

I was. [I] built the theater in Hobbs, New Mexico; Wink, Texas—all of them oil field

boom towns, and all of them requiring a tremendous amount of promotion in order to build and complete and operate after they were constructed.

Did Mr. Griffith finance this hotel from his own corporation, his own funds?

Partially. But I would say at least a third of the money had to come from outside sources.

Now, you said there were other brothers with R. E. [Griffith]. Who were they?

H. J., or Henry, Griffith and Louis, or L. C., Griffith were the other 2 brothers.

When did you start drawing plans for the hotel? You already had the conceptual idea, didn't you?

Yes.

Did you come to Las Vegas to do that?

No, the plans were drafted in Dallas, Texas, in an architectural office owned by myself and a fellow by the name of Jack Corgan.

When did you come to Las Vegas?

Came to Las Vegas to live in December of 1941.

Tell me about the Last Frontier.

Well, the Last Frontier was conceived to be as near western as we could make it. We had a dining room, the major dining room, the show room. It was constructed of stone. The lobby had extremely high ceilings with the fireplace running right up through the middle of it—actually 2 fireplaces in the lobby,

in the form of an octagon. The ceilings were of hewn timbers—logs—rough-sawed boards antiqued in such a way as to look many years old. And the whole structure was laid out on that basis.

What was the shape of the building?

The main building was in the form of a U. The part [with] the rooms was in the form of an old fort—in other words, completely enclosed on 4 sides with entrances under the second floor back into the center section, which was highly landscaped in a western-type character. There was an outside boiler room or machinery room that housed most of the major machinery for the operation. Other than house the boilers, it housed the major air conditioning equipment. We used cold water circulated in tunnels under the hotel to cool, with an individual unit in each room.

That was very innovative, wasn't it, to have refrigerated air conditioning at that time?

Well, there wasn't too much refrigeration around. It was innovative in as far as there were very few hotel rooms in the United States that had air conditioning. There were a few, but very few. Later, naturally, it became necessary due to climatic conditions; every hotel room had to have refrigerated air conditioning.

Oh, yes. People from California just couldn't stand the kind of weather we have in Las Vegas. That kind of air conditioning, though, was new enough that, when the hotel opened, Florence Lee Cahlan wrote an article and went into a great deal of description about the air conditioning. I know that it was considered really plush and the last thing.

How many rooms were there in the hotel?

Originally we opened with 105. Later we added approximately 100 rooms.

No more than that? I thought I had read someplace where they had planned for 170.

We did, but we cut off one wing of an H, which then formed it into a U. There were approximately 100 rooms added, as I remember it: 70 rooms in the main section of the hotel and approximately 30 rooms in the form of another motel structure that was adjoining the power house.

Well, in the same article I read that you were very innovative as far as fire protection was concerned. You had fire hoses every so many feet inside the building and also outside the building.

This is true. Frankly, while we didn't have sprinklers, we had no rooms higher than the third storey and only 3 on the third storey. Most of the rooms were not higher than 2 storeys, and anybody could've jumped out of them without any harm to them physically. So the sprinklers were not really necessary to protect life and lint in the hotels.

I read that there were parking spaces for 400 cars. That was considered a lot of parking in those days, wasn't it?

At that particular time it was, yes.

That was around the beginning of World War II; and since you were a motel-hotel really, a resort area, how did the war affect the hotel?

Well, it affected [the hotel] in quite a number of ways. Number one, in the construction of the hotel. If you will remember, the government set up controls on building,

and they had set up a control agency known as the War Production Board, which controlled the issuance of an establishment's ability to purchase anything that was on a critical list which had been published by the government.

That would include wiring, I suppose, and...?

Includes wiring and plumbing...all building materials. Essentially it got into lumber, got into electrical materials for the electrical work, got into plumbing and pipe for the plumbing work. It got into fixtures. It got into all types of building materials, you might say, including down as far as carpets—it restricted the use of [such items] except in the case of one's ability to show his connection to the war effort. Naturally, [in] the building of a hotel one could show a certain amount of ability to conform with the war effort in that you could house the military, and housing was necessary in this particular area due to Nellis Air Force Base [at the time known as the Las Vegas Army Air Field] . But again, we were up against one particular problem in that we could show no connection [to] helping out the war effort with anything to do with gambling.

No direct support of the war. [laughter]

That's right.

How did you get these supplies, then?

Well, they exempted anybody that had started construction on such type of structure, providing they could prove that they had the material before the institution of the War Production [Board] . We were in position to prove that, except the government, during the war, had the power to go in on any construction and take the materials when they were needed in the construction of anything

to do with the military effort. They did come to us while we were under construction and asked us to prove the existence of these materials and so forth. We had no alternative but to prove it if we wanted to continue with construction. But naturally, in proving same it gave the government a list of everything that you had. So they came in on our construction job at the hotel and essentially grabbed all of the material we had having to do with anything electrical and took the material in trucks to the army air base at Nellis. This being the case, we were up against the problem of continuing the operation. Having no electrical material forced us to go to northern and eastern Nevada and purchase 2 mines in order that we could obtain the electrical material in the mines.

So you just bought up the guts of a mine, literally? What did you do, send a crew up to the mines to get the materials out?

We sent a crew up there to strip the material out of the mines: wiring, casing, pipe, major control switches, even small switches.

Whose idea was that?

Well, we had brought an electrician out of Gallup, New Mexico, to run the electrical end of this business. Naturally, this electrician had operated in and around Gallup for a number of years and had wired any number of these big mines. So when we went over the problem with him—the fact the government had taken all these supplies—he stated that all of the small supplies could be obtained in and around Gallup, but that the larger equipment, including the larger wiring and whatnot, could not be obtained. His suggestion was that if we could find a couple of underground operations where they had been forced to run

electrical supply lines and so forth, that there would be enough major electrical equipment, including wire and conduit, that wouldn't compare enough with the code that we could obtain the exemptions against the code and go ahead and be able to finish the operation.

Well, it was a clever idea. Didn't the War Production Board have the power to take those things, too?

They could've if they had gotten a hold of it, but they had to get a hold of it and know you had it. That's the reason we made the deal on the basis [that] no reporting of the sale would ever be made.

You mean with the mines? So you just went merrily on your way wiring that hotel without the government's knowing it?

That's right. They couldn't stop the wiring, providing we had the wire. Well, we had the wire.

I've seen pictures of the stonework in the Ramona Room, the front of the building and in that main foyer. It was beautiful. Where did it come from?

The stone came from Red Rock Canyon, but the installation of same was made principally by Navajo Indians that we were able to bring in here from Gallup, New Mexico.

Where did you get all those wagon wheels that were around the terrace?

Well, a fellow by the name of Gibbs, was, you might say, a teamster in Las Vegas; [he] actually was in the business of plowing up land with horse-drawn equipment because

the horse could get into spots the big tractor couldn't. He happened to have horses, and he didn't own tractors. Over a period of years he had been in this business to the extent that he had wagons break down, and people would come to him wanting to sell him wheels and so forth. In view of the fact that there were so few people around that were interested in purchasing such stuff, he acquired most of this stuff very cheap. That be the case, he had an awful lot of equipment in the way of wagon wheels, horse-drawn harness—that is harness for horses on horse-drawn vehicles—and anything to do with a horse in the form of construction equipment.

Through Gibbs we were able to purchase most of the wagon wheels and what. Some of the stuff we were able to purchase out of Gallup, due to Mr. Griffith having built a similar-type hotel in Gallup and making certain contacts there. But most of it came through Gibbs and was purchased in Las Vegas.

From the pictures that I saw in Special Collections, there were quite a lot of wagon wheels there. How long were you in construction of the hotel?

Oh, we started in December of 1941 and opened in the latter part of October 1942. Just about a year.

There was one thing that interested me a lot. You planned to make it really a green place, didn't you? I remember the figure 3,700 trees and bushes were to be planted around that hotel out in the middle of the desert. It must've converted the desert.

Well, essentially that was the idea. In other words, you made an oasis in the desert. We did as much of it as we could.

You had the Ramona Room... that was the large dining room, and you had a stage there for entertainment, didn't you?

Yes, we did.

Then there was the Carrillo Room. Could you tell me a little about that?

Well, Mr. Griffith, due to having operated a theater a number of years, knew and had made friends with many performers in the theater-film industry. He knew and was a very good friend of Leo Carrillo, who was known at that particular time as quite a western star. He got a hold of Mr. Carrillo, asked him to come to Las Vegas [and] asked for permission on the telephone to name a room after him, which essentially was a bar.

That was a nice honor.

The bar was transformed from the old Pair O' Dice Club, which I'm sure had another name which I'm not familiar with.

Now, this was on the highway?

It was on the highway on the property that we purchased to build the Hotel Last Frontier. We incorporated it into the hotel proper.

So you built around the Pair O' Dice Club?

That's right. Essentially the Pair O' Dice Club was made up of a bar and a casino.

Was that the bar from the old Arizona Club?

No, it was not. That was the one that was named the Leo Carrillo Bar. We had a make-believe fireplace built into the bar. And we took out the dining room, naturally. We made

restrooms and storage room out of a part of the space in the kitchen, and we used the other portion with the bar and the extension of the dining room as the Leo Carrillo Bar and had a picture of Leo Carrillo as a part of the decoration in the room...a very large picture.

Did he come to the opening?

He came to the opening as our guest.

What was the other bar?

The other bar was called the Gay Nineties. [It] was a bar out of the old Arizona Club, which was in Block 16 of the red light district right in the heart of Las Vegas when I arrived in Las Vegas. We purchased the bar and the front entrance to the bar, which happened to be in the form of leaded glass, and put it into the hotel as the Gay Nineties Bar—used it exactly as it was originally built other than the fact that we did add some saddle bar stools made out of leather in the form of a western saddle. Naturally, we had to make it comfortable. We didn't use the complete saddle design, but looking at the rear of the bar stool was like looking at the rear of a saddle. So in some cases there were stools big enough for 2 people because you would actually be—what looked like—seated on the side of the saddle.

Well, that bar was magnificent. I've seen pictures of it. There was also a fine painting in the bar. Do you remember who painted that?

There's quite a story of an old scene in a gambling house. The scene was painted of a woman that had had too much to drink arguing with the bartender over additional booze. Some of us felt that maybe it was carrying things a little bit too strong—in

that it occupied one whole end of the bar—to depict the woman in as bad shape. The painter agreed to stop the painting, but if he did then, naturally, the painting would have to come off the wall. He insisted on painting it as he had originally made the deal; he was to have complete charge of the subject matter, and nobody was to interfere.

He was an artist. [laughter]

Naturally, we didn't want to do away with the picture, so we let him continue. It was well executed and a good artist's [portrayal] of a western scene and western characters and things that actually did happen in the early days in not only Las Vegas but all western communities.

We later found out why he insisted on going forth. He stated that the picture of the woman, while it didn't depict his wife in the way she looked, was actually depicting his wife in the fact that she had become an alcoholic and was getting worse and worse. If, when he had finished the picture and received the final commission on it, he hadn't been able to talk her into doing something about it, then he was going to put her in an institution with a major portion of the money and get out of town to another location. He did later talk his wife into joining Alcoholics Anonymous.

That was an oil painting?

That was an oil painting.

Do you remember who the painter was?

No, I don't.

Do you know whatever became of that painting?

No. I presume it probably went with the bar; the bar building and walls as well as

the bar and the whole front entrance and so forth was taken out at the time the Hotel Last Frontier was demolished to build a Frontier Hotel. I believe that's the way they carried the name. So I presume that painting is still in that building if the building still exists. I don't know.. Last time I saw it it was up on shoring stilts on the road directly behind the Hotel Last Frontier.

That was a magnificent bar, just a beautiful bar.

It was a beautiful bar.

There was also a gift shop, wasn't there, in the hotel?

There was, yes, in the lobby.

What kind of things were sold there?

All type of western jewelry...Indian jewelry, turquoise, silver, even down to gold and whatnot. But there was more turquoise and silver than gold items. Then they sold saddles; they sold bridles. There was one silver-mounted saddle and bridle there that was worth thousands of dollars that they did sell to somebody out of that gift shop. Who they sold to, I don't remember.

So there were really fine things there, then?

That's right.

The hotel really had an air of class about it, then, didn't it?

It did have. It was designed as a western-motif establishment, and we tried to carry that theme out in everything that was done.

The bedrooms were interesting.

Well, the only way that the bedrooms could be interesting was again in the design of the structure and principally in the furniture.

How was the furniture unique?

We had commissioned various furniture manufacturers to submit designs on furniture for the rooms. We selected the furniture from the designs, and they built according to their drawings so that you didn't have just a stereotyped piece of furniture.

Didn't the headboard of the bed have a horn....?

In some cases, yes. Other cases [they] had other types of western motifs.

Everything seems to have been very carefully thought out. I saw an advertising brochure that advertised "Duck, quail, pheasant, doves, grouse and sage hen. Deer and bobcat. Guides available." Where did they hunt those things?

Well, in Utah. The guides were available, and we'd get hold of the people and let them plan a trip with these guides. As an illustration, there was a banker out of the Midwest that used to come out here every year and stay 3 months at least—sometimes as much as 5 months. He was retired, so that he had a lot of time on his hands; there were others out of wealthy families in the East that came on the same basis; They would commission the guides, and they would set up planned trips to go on these various hunts or fishing or whatnot, and they made their own deals. Only time we entered into it was to be sure that the people were not being robbed in the fees that they were having to pay these people. We didn't draw anything out of it—never intended to draw anything out of it; it was just an accommodation to the guests.

I think it's interesting, though, that people came here to hunt and fish and do that kind of thing. Gambling was not the only drawing.

That's true. Today, they're putting on big tennis matches. That way, Las Vegas is getting national and international publicity without it costing the city of Las Vegas a penny. Boxing is another thing. Golfing is another thing. In other words, essentially there are reasons behind all of this. People that have the time to go to boxing matches and go to tennis matches and so forth and so on in most cases have money. So they have money to gamble and play with.

We're talking about promotion now, and I was talking to someone the other day who said that you were the one who began promoting Las Vegas in southern California first. You were the one who attracted attention to this area.

That is probably true in that we had to promote the theaters originally. I n working through them I had been promoting various events, various theatrical enterprises and so forth during high school, through college and so forth, so that it was not an unfamiliar thing with me. We were trying to tie the hotel and gambling business back to what we had learned in the theater business in bringing up an industry from nothing to where it had become a tremendous industry for the nation in a very short period of time.

What, exactly, did you do? It was certainly before television. It's easy to do now. But what kind of promotions did you make?

Well, as an illustration, we put on a road show. What I mean by road show is this: back in the old burlesque days, naturally there were burlesque entertainers. There was

originally the Chautauqua circuit, and then there came the burlesque and so forth. Well, you can hire these people or set up your own company and bring them in. But it finally got to the point where burlesque was no longer fashionable and the Chautauqua circuit was gone—the entertainers were all gone...all old or retired or so forth to where they just weren't available. So what we did was get together a certain picture and go to the studios and find out what they were making in the form of a continuing deal, such as *The Return of Jesse James* or all the *Jesse James* movies having to do with their robbing the bank and robbing the stagecoaches and robbing the various enterprises, including individuals. And we bought old western attire; we bought wax dummies of *Jesse James*....

The real thing. [laughter]

The real thing. We'd usually set up a display in front of the theater or in conjunction with the theater wherein we'd make a big to-do about what was in this motion picture and so forth. We would obtain the exclusive rights for the use of this picture. And in many cases the studios would send us, we'll say, one film clip or one roll of film out of the movie, and that would be shown prior to the actual use of the movie in the theater and was used in the form of a serial. In other words: this particular picture will be in Las Vegas, Nevada, on a certain time, and this is a clip out of the movie. And it was a free clip. People were not as sophisticated in the entertainment line then as they are today. So we had no problems because we already had an audience—in that we had them in the theater for another picture—and we'd show this clip as something free to them and promote them to come back.

Now, again, tying that back to the hotel business. Mr. Griffith used to make the

statement—right or wrong, he still made the statement—that the only thing wrong with the hotel business is that there were too many hotel people in it. He meant by that that there's very little promotion. They did very little catering to the public. It was a staid type business so that they essentially were interested in their own welfare and nobody else's.

They were a conservative lot, weren't they?

They were a conservative lot. So that be the case, he was trying to add to the business in order to bring it up to the point it is today, not only in Las Vegas, but in Hollywood and Los Angeles and Hoboken and so forth.

Any place where there's a successful hotel?

That's right. Again, this gets back to operations today, I feel...felt then and I feel now. We added it as a promotion as far as the town and hotel was concerned in that there must be some entertainment. Originally they started off with maybe a strolling unit in and around the bars composed of, we'll say, 3 musicians. If you had any entertainment, it was in the form of Sophie Tucker or Joe E. Lewis [and] so forth—one entertainer. Sometimes the entertainer carried his own unit with him.

Band or musicians?

Musicians—some other entertainers that tied back into him as an entertainer. In booking him you acquired the whole unit. But essentially that was it. Now, the first year of operation at the Hotel Last Frontier, just bear in mind the salaries then were considerably lower than they are on today's market.

We sold [our interest in the Last Frontier] in 1950. I say we sold out—I took stock for my architectural fee and wound up as the general manager and the vice-president of the hotel. [I] operated the hotel for 10 years during the entire operation as long as the particular group I was originally associated with was in the hotel as owners or operators.

Well, did you start a different entertainment policy?

We started a different entertainment policy. Our first year in business we spent \$185,000. That was the entire budget.

For entertainment? [laughter]

For entertainment.

And you had some very good people, I know, from the newspapers.

That's right. And the last year in business we expended over 2 million.

In 1950?

In 1950. Now, that's the difference in just our operation.

Well, what did you do that was different from what El Rancho did?

Not a lot more. Except that we forced El Rancho to come up in order to stay in competition. If they hadn't jumped into the puddle and come up, we probably could've booked that same entertainment for a million that we had to pay 2 [million] for. It's unfortunate, but again, it gets back to the same thing I told you about the theater.

But I noticed from the newspaper that from the very first you had several people on the bill all the time, rather than just one person. For example, you had Pinky Tomlin as master of ceremonies; that was certainly a good name to have. And you had a musician and a Spanish dancer, and you had a number of people who were entertainers.

Again, there was one advantage that we possibly had over Mr. Hull. That is that fact that Griffith, [who] had been in the theater business, was able to go to a lot of these entertainers and talk them into coming to Las Vegas, where Hull did not have that power to so do. Naturally, if they came here we were willing to pay them, we'll say, \$500 a week. Hull said, "Well, all right. You come down to my establishment, and I'll give you \$1,000 a week."

But you were really creating jobs here, weren't you, in the entertainment field?

We were creating jobs, yes. But we were also in a position of furnishing our own competition. We had no alternative.

And that's why it cost you 2 million 10 years later?

That's right. But again, the only way that we could've got this is to own all the hotels. Well, that's impossible.

It would've been nice.

It would've been nice.

Now, I see how you promoted the hotel, but when you went to southern California to get the people interested in coming over here for

weekends and for holidays in the resort, what kind of tactics did you use?

Here's an illustration: we started the first airplane promotion.

That's interesting. What was that?

Inducing people, for a reduced fee, to come to Las Vegas. They bought their ticket in Los Angeles or in Detroit or in Dallas or whatnot, and we made a deal with the individual operators. One of the people we made a deal with, as an illustration, is Kirk Kerkorian, who later turned up in Las Vegas in the hotel business—built what is now the Hilton Hotel. Had we not made a deal with him originally, who was in the airplane business...

Kerkorian was at that time?

Yes. He was in the business of transportation and owned quite a number of airplanes. [Hell was in a position to buy quite a number of others at a very reduced rate.]

What line was Kerkorian with?

Had his own line; I don't even remember the name of it. But we didn't deal with Kerkorian directly. In other words, he had somebody working for him that we dealt with.

So you had a package: low fare and then maybe a weekend or 3 days for a set fee?

That's right. It included the room; it included a certain number of meals. It included the transportation to and from, all at a price—a very reduced one.

So that did attract a lot of people?

And it attracted a lot of people.

Well, that's innovative.

We originally started it on the buses.

Was this in southern California?

Yes. The buses were slow and....

Same kind of deal, though...a package deal?

Package deal and so forth. After we got that started, we decided, well, we can make a deal on the airplane. So we made a deal. Naturally, we're not going to be the only fish in the pond, so others were forced to go into it, which they did do.

Did you advertise a great deal in newspapers and] on radio?

Yes, yes we did. It's the same proposition as the entertainment. Our first year in business, of course, we were right in the middle of the war, so you've got to take care of the military when the military want to show. It didn't make any difference when they want to show, you got to take care of them. So we were forced during this period to get out and find rooms in other establishments, even to the point of private homes because they'd call from the army air base out here, and: "We've got 5 generals," and so forth and so on, "and we want them put up there tonight." Well, they run 30 rooms in on them. Had no alternative—you had to give them the rooms. They have the power to come out there and just move the people out of their room, even if they were in it. So you took care of them.

That was good advertising, though.

You had to take care of the people. So you didn't stand up there and act like a dummy; you got out and found the rooms. You didn't say, "Well, you get a cab," and whatnot. We actually took the station wagon—the hotel station wagon—and hauled them down there ourselves.

Did you often have to go out into the town and ask for rooms?

Yes, we did. There's an illustration. There's a period of one year that we actually occupied one motel here in town. That's all we had was a motel. We were using the rooms so often that I just went to them and made a deal. We bought 70 rooms from them every night.

What motel was that?

It was one right across the street from where the Desert Inn is now located. So we bought 70 rooms and paid them whether we used them or not. In most cases we used them. I can't even remember the name of the motel. But we made a point of accommodating the people.

You were certainly service oriented, weren't you?

That's right. Take the average motel, as an illustration, a small motel. You go in, and you get a little bitty old towel that by the time you finish drying half your body the thing's wet. Soaked.

[laughter]

That's the truth!

That's right. [laughter]

So you don't have a feeling of luxury. OK. Part of feeling luxurious, as an illustration, is that sumptuous feeling that washing....

A big heavy towel....

So forth and so on. It goes without saying that a hell of a lot of this stuff is packed off out of the rooms, but it just becomes an expense of operation as far as we were concerned in operating the hotel.

Of course, that's an advertisement—every time your towel appears someplace.

That's right. Now, we even got this strong; we even took our name off the towels.

Because you had so many taken?

No, no. Because we knew that it was a way better towel than were being used in the average person's home— even the wealthy people's homes. We knew that if Jim Jones took a bunch of those towels, wash rags and whatnot, that Mrs. Smith down the street who happens to visit that person's home is going to insist [on] knowing where those towels and whatnot came from. He can't tell, or he tells them what happened; so in our opinion, over a period of time, he would finally wind up telling where they came from. "They were just so damn nice," and so forth and so on, "that I just took them." And that's what did happen. We even had people—not just a few letters, but by the hundreds of letters—write and ask where they could buy that quality of material.

That kind of luxury?

That's right. So what we were trying to establish was luxury, and it accomplished what we tried to do.

Another thing that we did—my board finally got me down on it, but I still think I was right—another thing that we did in the way of promotion [was] we used real silver.

Sterling?

Sterling.

Didn't you miss a lot of that?

Yes, we did. But it was my contention that most of the stuff that we were missing was being dumped out by our own employees into the garbage. And it was true then, and it is still true today. So you made a deal with your garbage man—the guy that's picking up the garbage out of the hotel and feeding it to the pigs and so forth. To start with he could care less, if he's feeding pigs, whether you got sterling silver or whether you got the worst stuff on earth. [It's] just so much metal as far as he's concerned. So, my contention was that we go make a deal with him and pay him so much a fork or so much a knife, or a combination of some kind, that he'd be tickled to death to gather that junk up, wash it and bring it back.

Make it worth his while.

So we did, and we found that fully 75 and usually about 85 percent of the stuff that people thought was being stolen was not being stolen at all.

Just carelessness in the kitchen.

So we were getting back the most of it. The biggest damage was the rough treatment of the silver. But, anyway, we started that. Naturally, if you keep that stuff polished you're setting a hell of a table. I mean it really shows up bright.

Yes, it's elegant.

Now, individual services for coffee, so forth and so on, were still sterling silver, and individual serving dishes that you left at the table are sterling silver.

You mean serving pieces?

Yes. Our contention was that all that bother with the linen was the same thing as the silver. It was being hauled away; not stolen, but hauled away as garbage. And again, if you made the right kind of a deal, you'd get it picked up and hauled back to you.

Did you have your own laundry facilities, or did you send it out?

We had our own laundry facility. We didn't have in the beginning, but the laundry bill got so high that we finally put in the laundry equipment. Went down here to... right out of Barstow there—the army surplus store— and we were able to buy a complete laundry facility. It was our contention that if they could set up a laundry facility for taking care of all of that army-navy bunch, it certainly ought to be big enough to take care of ours. It was, and they did a hell of a job. But again, we tried in every way possible to create that luxury.

I read in the newspaper about the fine meals that were served. How did you manage that during war-time rationing?

Again, getting back to the War Production Board, it was necessary to have points, which were done in the form of stamps, in order to purchase anything on the critical list with the army, navy, and whatnot. Well, to be perfectly frank, there were few items that were not on

the list. So you had to have points for sugar, had to have points for beef and might need anything in the form of meat. You had to have points for gasoline, which involved the transportation of the particular merchandise and whatnot, so that you're really up against a problem. We were able to get a reasonable number of points, but the thing that really helped us was the fact that we did take care of the military. When we were in a problem and needed the points, we just went to the military and said, "Here, you want us to take care of you; now you take care of us. You make it possible for us to get those points so that we can purchase the stuff we want."

You were able to do that?

We were able to do that—all unofficially.

Now, you told me something about a ranch up in Moapa that also helped you out along those lines.

Yes, that's right. We bought 2 ranches in Moapa Valley. One we converted into a dairy with 300 milk cows and bought most of the milk [products]. [We got our herd] out of Cache Valley, Utah. [We] made our own butter—were able to make our own buttermilk. Got our own milk, you might say, in a much more desirable form and fresher than you would've been able to get out of the local dairy. We later took the second ranch, which we had set up as a dude ranch in the beginning, and converted it into registered cattle and the growing of cattle for butchering for the hotel.

Did you do your own butchering? I mean, did you have a crew there to butcher?

Certain amounts, yes. We were able to obtain permits for the rest, so that essentially

we were able to sell the cattle to processors, who turned around and sold the meat back to us.

What did you do about the stamps and the points for that?

Well, when it got up to the point that we didn't have any points and we couldn't make a trade with the army or navy at Nellis, then we just sold the cattle to the processors, who in turn were able to furnish us with enough stamps to make our own cattle purchases back.

How large a herd did you have? Was this a sizable operation?

Well, we were butchering quite a number of head up there every month.

I'd like to pursue your other ranching operations a little. Did the dude ranch have a name?

Hidden Valley Ranch.

Were people admitted to the Hidden Valley Ranch just from the hotel, or could you come to the Hidden Valley Ranch without going to the hotel in Las Vegas?

We never operated it as a dude ranch.

Oh, you didn't?

No. We fixed it up, made all the repairs and painted the place inside and out and put in corrals and so forth and so on, but we never operated the thing as a dude ranch.

But you had the intention to operate it, originally?

We had the intention, but we had so much trouble in inducing people to go there—even

as guests, wherein it cost them nothing—that we felt that in view of that it would be practically impossible to induce people to pay to be customers of the dude ranch. So we never operated it.

Why do you suppose there was that reluctance?

I do not know, except that as we tried to analyze it, it became apparent that they came to Las Vegas for entertainment, and they felt that the type of entertainment that they obtained at a dude ranch they could obtain at home. They did not have the type of entertainment and the various facilities such as gambling and so forth available at home.

You wouldn't have had gambling at the dude ranch?

No.

So that they didn't want to rough it then, really?

It wasn't a matter of that. They just did not seem to want to go up there.

So you never had any guests up there?

No, except as free guests. And they would go with the idea that they were going to be there for a week, 10 days, and within 2 or 3 days after they got there they started wanting to come back to Las Vegas. So, in view of that, we just never opened it up as a dude ranch.

So that was a heavy expenditure for no return, right?

Well, we tried to hold down the costs when we were originally doing it, so other than maybe a little fancier corral or that type

of thing, it was what we had to do anyway to operate a regular ranch.

The buildings were already there?

They all were already there, and we didn't build any new ones.

What happened to the ranch then when you decided you couldn't use it for a dude ranch? How did you utilize it?

We sold it. We operated it as a regular ranch. We had 2 ranches up there, really, and one of them we operated in such a way and planted feed and whatnot to feed out cattle, and we did feed out a number of head and butchered there on the ranch. We did operate [the other] as a dairy. We had, I believe, a 300 cow dairy, and we put in the automatic milkers and operated it as a regular dairy. [We] used what milk we could in our own establishment, and what we couldn't use, we sold on the open market in Las Vegas.

That was to ensure yourself a supply of dairy products during the war, right?

That's right.

Did the dairy farm have a name?

No, it was just called the Hidden Valley Ranch; we operated it as one entity, actually.

To whom did you sell the dude ranch portion?

I believe we sold it to Mr. Rupert, who was in the plumbing-contracting business in Las Vegas.

Do you remember his first name?

A. R. Rupert, I believe.

And about what year was that?

I do not remember the exact year that was. It was after the war was over with.

Oh, so you held that ranch all during the war, then?

Yes. [It was] somewhere around 1945 or 1946 that we sold it. We sold the dairy ranch to Kenny Searles, who operated the Anderson Dairy here in Las Vegas. He continued to operate it as a dairy ranch, and I think still is operating it as a dairy ranch.

You just had no more need for that kind of an operation?

That's right.

You had a very interesting innovation at the hotel— the Last Frontier Village. What can you tell me about that?

Well, the Last Frontier Village was to induce additional customers to come to the hotel and to induce additional customers to come to Las Vegas. We knew of old, early-Nevada trains, various and sundry operating equipment, old stores, jails, so forth and so on that had been collected by a fellow by the name of Robert Caudill in Elko, Nevada, who had gotten the name of Doby Doc. Where he got the name I do not know, but everybody called him Doby, and nobody knew him by the name of Robert Caudill. But that was his actual name. [On] various trips to Elko for state hotel conventions and so forth, I had seen the various collections that Caudill had gotten together. It was stored in his own warehouse and/or yard. It had not been put together; it was not on display.

It was there in a very junky condition. I'd happened to see it principally because I was interested in Nevada history and, you might say, old western history, and I'd felt for a long time that most of the old relics in Nevada had been allowed to deteriorate and sold out to other areas, such as San Francisco and Los Angeles and St. Louis, Missouri, and so forth and so on. There had been nothing done to try and preserve the old Nevada collection—such as collections having to do with the early railroads, collections having to do with the Indian costumes and dress, old gold collections, old car collections and so forth.

So we started creating that whole street or village as it would have existed in Nevada or any other part of the West—but principally in Nevada—and attempted to display all the stuff in a museum-usable fashion, so that it could be displayed in public and the public would be allowed to see it and use it and actually were not to be charged for viewing it.

It was just to get people to the hotel and casino?

Yes, it was. It was an advertising method in order to induce people to come to the hotel and stay there—patronize the hotel, patronize the village. We actually operated 2 bars and a gambling casino and a couple of restaurants. We had an old carousel, old original-type circus equipment, which did not come out of Doby's collection. We did display his engines and trains and attempted to repaint them and decorate them as they were originally done at the time they were in actual operation in Nevada.

Was the concept yours? Was the idea of the village yours?

Yes, it was.

When did the Last Frontier Village begin? When did you open?

Either 1949 or 1950.

You said that you had commercial enterprises in the village, and you mentioned 2 bars. What were their names?

We had no particular names for them, as I remember it.

What about the Silver Slipper?

Well, there was a Silver Slipper there. Actually it was, you might say, the Silver Slipper Bar, if you wanted to give the bar that name.

In our preliminary interview you told me a fascinating story about how it got the name Silver Slipper—that it originally was to have been called the Golden Slipper. Would you tell me that for the tape?

Yes, it was originally called the Golden Slipper. We even had all of our advertising—menus, matches, so forth and so on—printed with Golden Slipper on them. And when we started advertising in the newspaper to announce the grand opening of the facilities, we received a call from Art Ham, who was the attorney and major stockholder in the Golden Nugget.

What did he say?

He indicated that he felt that we were infringing on the name of Golden Nugget by our Golden Slipper, and that the design was near enough to that of the Golden Nugget.

You mean the sign?

No, the design of the actual structure itself.

Oh, I see. The building itself.

Yes. The idea was similar in the type of establishments that we were operating. [He said] that if we insisted on using the name Golden Slipper and did so, that he would sue us claiming that we were infringing on the Golden Nugget, and that they had copyrighted the name Golden Nugget and felt that we were subject to considerable damages on the part of the court. For this reason, the name was changed. It cost us somewhere in the neighborhood of \$50,000 to reprint all the various advertising menus and so forth, but we felt that if he could make it stick in court, we would be subject to the damages he was referring to.

We had no idea what damages would be assessed by the court and felt that we were on thin ground, and we felt that we had better change the name. We went out on the Boulder Highway and contacted an individual that owned an establishment—a bar and gambling casino—during the early part of the war and very possibly existed even before the war. I never did attempt to find out when it was first put in there. But the name of the establishment was the Silver Slipper.

You knew about it out there?

I knew about it. So we contacted the woman who owned the bar, and made a deal to buy the name Silver Slipper—wherein she would discontinue the use of it—and agreed to buy her new signs changing the name. What she changed it to, I do not even remember. But we bought the name; naturally, any signs that she had did not fit what we wanted to use. We just wanted to use the name. Then

we changed all of our advertising—the signs for the building and so forth.

That was a quick switch, wasn't it?

It was a quick switch, yes.

I know that you had a contest for a girl who could fit into a slipper, because you gave the library [University of Nevada Las Vegas James Dickinson Library] a slipper; and it, incidentally, was gold. Can you remember anything about that contest?

It turned out to be the wife of one of the employees, and she was the only one that fit the slipper that we had and used in the advertising.

You just went out and bought a little slipper? It was for a pretty small foot.

Yes, it was a rather small foot. So later, we picked up one of her slippers and had it gold plated, and then later silver plated when we changed the name from the Golden Slipper to the Silver Slipper.

Well, the one you gave us is still gold plated. Do you remember the girl's name?

No, I do not.

It was just a promotion, then?

Yes, it was. She was given a considerable prize, and she was touted at the opening of the Silver Slipper and so forth, but I just do not remember the exact details at the present time.

Were there a lot of girls who tried out for the silver slipper?

Yes, quite a number.

They could just come in and put their foot in that slipper to see if it fit?

That's right.

Well, it sounds like fun.

It was.

You said there were other commercial shops [in the village]. Fanny [Soss] had a shop there, didn't she—the dress shop?

Yes.

So all the buildings weren't old Nevada buildings. There were some new replica buildings built?

Yes.

Hers looked very modern and nice.

Yes. I believe that her particular building was part of an older building that was later—due to the fact that she felt that she had to have a more modern structure because of selling modern-day women's clothes—remodeled into a more up-to-date period from the original structure.

Can you remember any other commercial enterprises in the village?

Well, there was a rock shop there. They sold various and sundry rocks of all descriptions and geological periods. And there was a leather shop. There was a shop there that sold paintings of various Nevada artists of that particular period—paintings of the old towns, the old equipment, horses, so forth.

Western subjects usually?

Western subjects.

Were they leased, or did they give part of their profits to the village? How did that work?

They were leased...most of them on a monthly basis against a percentage of their profits.

How long did the village last?

Well, it was in operation at the time the village and hotel were sold.

That would be 1950?

I believe it was 1950 or 1951 when the hotel was sold.

You told me an interesting story in our preliminary interview about the filling station and how profitably you operated that. Where did the building come from?

We built the building. It was a replica of that particular period. It was not a replica of a filling station. In other words, the design was of a particular period.

Did you design the building?

No, it was designed by [Walter] Zick and [Harris] Sharp, Las Vegas architects. Originally, because Texaco had [been] using a fire chief—old, you might say, western-type advertising on their stations and promotion—we felt that it was a good tie-in for the Last Frontier Village. We had Zick and Sharp design a structure using the period-type architecture that tied in with the old fire engine and tied in with Texaco's advertising. They came up with

the design, and after several changes it was adapted to the particular structure and later built. What you were referring to when you said unusual type of promotion, we went to Texaco with the idea. Part of the idea was to put showers, restrooms and so forth that would be inducive to the people cleaning up after a drive across the desert. These restrooms were rather elaborate—quite a number of stools and lavatories—various types of equipment that we could use in promotion, where the people would have the service that could be advertised on the road.

Did you charge for the showers?

No, we didn't. So the station itself was a rather costly station compared to the average station that's built today. But we felt that it was worth it at the time, and I still do feel that it was a good promotion.

Did your company pay for the building of the structure?

Yes. We leased the land to Texaco originally. They in turn leased it back to the company for a dollar a year. In turn, our company built the station, put the signs on; Texaco furnished the equipment in the dollar-a-year lease, such as the gasoline pumps and the equipment in the repair facility—they're called, I believe, bays in the filling station trade. They were, as I remember, full bays with automatic lifts and so forth, making it a modern filling station in today's operation. And we used the old horse-drawn fire engine that Texaco had used in their advertising.

But that belonged to Doby Doc, didn't it, that fire engine? Wasn't that in his collection?

The fire engine belonged to Doby Doc, but we didn't use the fire engine as the sign.

We had a sign company build a sign for the top of the marquee over the filling station. It was both electrical bulbs and neon, and a very fancy sign showing the old horse-drawn vehicles. The horses were painted on the sign and so forth. It became part of the advertising.

Then we leased the operation to an operator on a gallon lease basis and were able to get—because of the facilities that we furnished—approximately 3C a gallon for the final lease on the station. The station was one of the very few on the highway at that particular time and did a substantial business at 2½ cents to 3 cents per gallon of gasoline pumped; it became a very profitable part of the operation.

So you leased it to someone to operate it for you?

We leased it to a fellow by the name of Andy Anderson...a local boy here, who's dead now. He was a big, very jovial fellow. He liked the idea of operating the station and entered into all of the promotions that he could enter into, using the old fire engine that we had leased from Doby Doc. While it was not horse-drawn—it was, you might say, a truck-drawn vehicle—it was of a type that was similar to the type of equipment that was originally horse-drawn.

What happened to those buildings?

Well, I do not know.

Was the village operated after you sold out in 1950 or 1951?

It was in operation at the time we sold. What they did with it later I do not know. I believe they just elected not to operate the

station, and when the various leases ran out the then operators just tore down the station.

The people who bought the hotel and casino were no longer interested in that really old western motif?

They were interested in the operation of the Silver Slipper as such, but they were not interested in the operation of the western village that went along with the Silver Slipper.

But they did considerable remodeling of the hotel-casino, too, didn't they?

Yes, they did. So what existed in their minds, I do not know.

I know that they painted over that beautiful stonework in the foyer there.

Yes, they did make quite a number of changes—you might say, modernized some of the western motifs that we had originally put into the building.

There was another innovation of yours—the Little Church of the West. Can you tell me about that?

Yes. When we first opened the hotel, there was quite a number of marriages and divorces. And it was quite a part of the business that existed in Las Vegas. In other words, the divorcees would come and live here for 6 weeks, and naturally they spent what money they had to spend, and it became a part of the operation in Las Vegas. There were a number of marriages, and it was promoted quite thoroughly at the time. We thought, because of the old churches that we had seen in western towns still existing in California and Nevada—old churches that still existed

and were in operation—that we could make a church a part of the wedding chapel business. Most of the wedding chapels had the interior of a chapel or church, but the exteriors were usually an old home or a part of another structure of some kind.

P. Were there many of those chapels?

There were probably as many as 25 or 30 in the whole town.

Where were they generally located?

All over town, but principally [on] lead-in roads into the town and out of the town. They existed on what is known as the Boulder Highway, or Fremont Street, and Highway 91, which was Fifth Street. It's now known as Las Vegas Boulevard North and South.

So you got them coming and going.

I went to California and took numerous pictures of an old church that existed and was in operation, and then brought the pictures back and induced Zick and Sharp to reduce them down in size using the whole scale of the church and the measurements that I took at the time I took the pictures, so they became a miniature of the actual church in operation in the state of California. They did make the drawings, and we got our maintenance crew at the hotel to build it according to the drawings that they made on a miniature basis. Then [we] hired a wedding chapel director or employee to handle the various weddings.

Who was that? Do you remember?

Well, numerous ones during the time that we operated the church—or chapel, if you want to call it that—Helen Connors being one of them. I do not know her name now,

but I believe you have talked to her, and she originally was Mrs. Keeper. That is not her name at the present time.

Yes, she talked to me at length about that.

She was one of the directors. There were 2 or 3 others. Originally we tried to do it in conjunction with the publicity department of the hotel. I believe the original director of the chapel was a girl by the name of Jerrie Wycoff, who was in charge of the publicity at the hotel when we first opened the chapel.

That was the first wedding chapel that was constructed specifically to be a wedding chapel: the rest were renovated buildings and make-dos?

Yes, as far as I know.

How long did it stay on site there?

I think at the time we sold the hotel it was still in existence. It was later moved to the opposite end of the property when certain improvements were made in the hotel. I do not know when it was moved, but it was picked up and moved in its entirety to the south end of the hotel grounds and then operated there as a chapel for several years. When the Fashion Show shopping center was built on the Strip, it was moved again. What was done with it then, I do not know.

Well, it's down at the Hacienda Hotel now, I believe— down at the other end of the Strip. It's a lovely building.

You've been engaged in a number of enterprises, Mr. Moore, and one of them I know was the development of the Showboat. Would you care to talk about that?

Well, I was operating the Hotel El Cortez.

Oh, you got into the El Cortez before you went into the Showboat?

Yes.

Is that where you went after you left the Frontier?

Yes. At the time the Frontier was sold, I negotiated a lease on the Hotel El Cortez, and induced, I think it was, 20 people to join me as partners. We remodeled the El Cortez—sandblasted and refinished all the furniture and fixtures that we could use—and later opened the Cortez in the remodeled state with the partners. During the time that we were operating the Hotel El Cortez, a group attempted to move 6 or 8 of the buildings that existed out at Henderson someplace and were originally used as a barracks for employees out at Henderson. They had moved these barracks buildings in on a piece of property on the Boulder Highway and were attempting to install a motel.

They were going to utilize these buildings?

Utilize these buildings and remodel them into a motel.

They'd been used out on the Davis Dam construction, hadn't they?

It's possible that some of them came from Davis Dam construction. Where they were used, I do not know. I do know that at the time I got interested in the project, they had already moved the buildings onto a foundation on the property, and that's where it had stopped. In other words, they hadn't remodeled them

any, and they had bought some washed-air air conditioning equipment.

Swamp coolers.

Swamp coolers...which were not satisfactory for what we wanted to use them for. And they had bought quite a little of the plumbing supplies for bathrooms and tubs and showers and so forth and so on. But they hadn't used any of it; they had it stored in the compound.

They had apparently gone broke because they were having an auction on the property, including the buildings and what equipment was there and whatnot. In the advertising on the auction they published a list of the equipment, the number of buildings, the number of rooms in each building and so forth. After a survey that I had made, I felt that it was the absolute center of the population of the whole valley and that it would be a good location for a hotel/gambling establishment—a public enterprise of sorts. So I went to the auction with the idea that—if it didn't get too high—I would buy the property at auction and either go forward with a motel or decide not to use it and move the old barracks off and use it for a hotel project.

I attended the auction, then started bidding, and it became obvious that I only had one bidder against me and that all we were doing was just sitting there bidding up the price that each of us was willing to pay. So I contacted the fellow who was bidding against me. I asked him if he wanted to join me in the enterprise and told him what I had in mind and told him that it would probably later be put into a corporate entity. And he agreed to join me.

How did you do this while the bidding was going on?

They usually have certain periods during any of the bidding where they stop the bidding for a short period of time. It was very hot at the time the bidding was done, and every now and then they'd stop it to allow people to get a drink of water or to have some refreshments and so forth and so on. So they stopped it long enough—for what reason, I do not remember now—where I was allowed to contact him and go into this thing which only took a few minutes.

It was agreed that I would handle the bidding in the future; it was agreed what percentage he would have in the project—for which, naturally, he had to put up money. When the bidding opened again, why, I was the only bidder, so one additional bid on my part allowed me to buy the hotel.

Do you remember what your bid was?

No, I do not remember.

So you examined all your acquisitions?

Yes, and decided that the plumbing fixtures and whatnot were of too cheap a type that would not allow a decent bathroom to be installed with each of the rooms.

You always liked first class, didn't you?

Well, the town demanded it, frankly. It wasn't a matter of my liking it; it was trying to put in something that you could sell. You had to put in something that would appeal to the customers.

So we decided that we would sell the buildings, allowing a certain time to move the buildings, and sell the plumbing fixtures and whatnot.. .or give them away—anyway, dispose of them in some fashion. And we did sell 3 of the buildings.

How many did you have originally?

I guess there were 5 buildings. [We] sold 3 of them [but] were not able to sell any more at that particular time. I called in contractors to see if I could get the buildings torn down to use the lumber, and in most cases they were not willing to tear the buildings down for the lumber. [They] felt that it would cost them too much...they could go buy new lumber cheaper than they could buy the lumber in the building and then furnish the labor to tear it down and pull the nails and so forth.

You were offering the buildings for salvage?

Yes. So they moved the 3 buildings off. They also took the plumbing to go with the 3 buildings, and the other plumbing we sold out as salvage. [We got] probably 20 cents on the dollar for it. The other structures were [still] there, so we called in the fire department, and they set it up as a project and set the buildings on fire and used it to train the firemen to put out the fires on the buildings. Later, they set them on fire and burned them completely to the ground.

What a marvelous solution! [laughter]

Then we called in a couple of architects out of Salt Lake City, and they designed a high-class motel structure.

Who were the architects?

Do not remember. I think it's in the early promotion or advertising on the opening of the hotel, but I do not remember their names.

How did you decide on the theme—the Showboat? That was decided, wasn't it, by the time you went to the architects?

Well, yes. There was no theme; everything was western around here at the particular time. The theme of the Showboat or the old structures had to do with the early days of that particular western period in San Francisco and in St. Louis, Missouri, and so forth and so on. The theme hadn't been used, so we felt that we'd use the theme. When they first laid the property out, it was not laid out with the thought in mind that we would build a casino, bar and restaurant in connection with the Showboat.

It was just going to be a motel-hotel?

Going to be a high-class motel. But soon after we started designing the motel, I was approached by one of the partners in the old El Cortez wanting to know if he could get a group of people together, and if we would build the outside of the structure for a casino, bar and restaurant in conjunction with the motel. He would take a lease on the structure at this point and cause the interior to be put in along this theme of the Showboat for a casino, bar and restaurant. We tentatively made a deal with him— Joe Kelly, who's now president of the Showboat operation. And he brought 2 people in with him.

Who were they?

Both of them were in the used car business here in Las Vegas at the time. I do not remember their names; however, their names are in the early promotion advertising and, I'm sure, can be gotten together. They, in turn, made a deal with a group out of the Desert Inn, and they had the interior designed by studio designers and architects. I don't know that there was an actual architect in the group, but they had to have an architect sign the original documents. What arrangement

was made along those lines, I do not know, but they did have the studio designers.

What do you mean, studio designers?

Well, every one of the major picture studios in Hollywood and the Los Angeles general area all had [design] departments. These designers have got a complete library—a very extensive library—of pictures and drawings and blueprints and so forth and so on; it's a very elaborate filing system, and these designers design these sets for the motion pictures. They happened to catch the designers on a strike on the studios, which allowed them the use of the whole group of them. As a consequence, they probably got more authentic work done quicker than they would have gotten done had this strike not been going on.

That was a lucky break.

Yes. But anyway, they designed the complete interior, including the casino, the bar, the restaurant, the bingo parlor and so forth. And, naturally, [they] kept submitting it to me for approval before they were allowed to go ahead and build. They did go ahead and build and finished up and opened, naturally, at the same time we opened the room part of the hotel. They didn't want to operate [all] of this structure. [They] were principally interested in the gambling end of the operation. So the lease was later revised, and we—that is, the hotel corporation—operated the bar and the restaurant and the room section, and they essentially operated the gambling end of the business.

That was in about 1961?

Nineteen sixty-one was when I sold out, but we opened the structure in 1954.

The day before the opening you had a big rainstorm here, didn't you?

Yes, we did.

I read a newspaper account that said there were several inches of rain out there and that the Showboat indeed looked like a Showboat for a short time!

That was the most water I've ever seen in the valley. If we ever get that type of a rain again, there's going to be a lot of trouble in Las Vegas because they closed up natural drainage channels; they built buildings of all types and descriptions, including homes and so forth, all over the valley. Even in front of my home, which at that time was on Sixth Street in the 1200 block—1201 south Sixth—the water was running over the curb in front of my home with no particular drainage channels in the area. So that will give you an idea of how much water there was in this valley.

That's one of those 100 year rains, I think they call them.

Yes. And we had to put sandbags all around the Showboat Hotel—built the sandbags at all entrances. We built them up as high as 2 feet, and at times it looked like we were going to have to go higher yet in order to keep the water out of the hotel. Finally it did get in there, in spite of us, to the point that the entire carpet and whole public area was absolutely sopping wet, and the water in and around the Showboat Hotel down there was approximately 2 feet above the roadway that exists today.

We had just put in all of the grading and gravel and whatnot for all the parking lot in and around the hotel, and the paving had not been installed. The only way that we could

open when we said that we *would* open was to go in there and work night and day, 24 hours around the clock, with what we called cats and cans. In other words, we had to pull out all the dirt around the hotel and in the parking lot that had been put in and rolled out, and then haul in truckload after truckload after truckload of new gravel— dry gravel—and put it back into shape, roll it and then put the paving in. Just the extra labor that I had to pay the contractor for that 4 days amounted to in excess of \$20,000, and then we had to buy all of the gravel at \$3 a yard, and we had to pay the contractor for his additional time and whatnot. In other words, the water probably cost us in excess of \$100,000 to \$150,000 in order to open on time. Today it would probably cost close to a half million dollars.

It was an expensive rain, wasn't it?

It was.

How many rooms can you recall were in the hotel originally? There are so many now.

There was, I believe, 110 rooms.

It was a 2 storey building, wasn't it?

Yes.

When we were talking about the man against whom you were bidding, we never mentioned his name.

A fellow by the name of Miles; [he] owns the Miles Hotel in Salt Lake City.

Can you remember who some of the other men were?

Well, he was the only one. Later we sold stock in the Showboat corporation, and there were other people involved at that particular time. That's when the partners in the El Cortez all came into it.

And they maintained their interest in the El Cortez, too?

They maintained the interest in the El Cortez and had the same interest—bought the same interest—in the Showboat. In addition to that, we had other people, too, that joined that particular group. Robert Kaltenborn was one of the big stockholders in there, originally. I believe that other than Miles, he is the only substantial outside stockholder. Locally, there was a fellow by the name of Pierce...sold quite a little stock to Easterners that owned stock in the Golden Nugget. They all became a part of the group that owned substantial stock.

Wasn't J. K. Houssels part of that enterprise, too?

He was a part of the El Cortez partnership group. He became a major stockholder in the Showboat enterprise because all of the partners joined in from the El Cortez.

Did you sever your relationship with the El Cortez when you went on to develop the Showboat, or did you maintain both?

No. That's the reason they all wound up with the same percentage interest to stop any severance. In other words, they were all a part of it, so there was no reason to sever it.

How long did you maintain that interest in the Showboat and the El Cortez?

I sold out to, you might say, the El Cortez partnership group in 1961. In other words, I sold my interest in the Showboat; all the other stockholders sold, except the El Cortez partnership group. They organized a corporation and bought out all of the other stockholders of the Showboat.

You didn't have the attachment and the feeling for the El Cortez and the Showboat that you had for the Old Frontier?

No.

There was more invested of yourself in that first enterprise?

Well, in the first enterprise I was the architect and actually designed the enterprise. I had to do a lot of the promotion of the money, and I just had expended more time and more effort in the Frontier project, and as a consequence I had a deeper personal feeling for it.

Well, it was a family enterprise, too.

Yes. We owned the Frontier, you might say, lock, stock and barrel with the family members and people that had been associated with the family members for years. I'd known most of the men since I was 6 or 8 years old. And in the theater business, I was an architect, [and] we built theaters all over the United States. Dealt with many of these men prior to the family dealing with them, so naturally I would have more of a feeling for the [Frontier].

Well, you left those enterprises in 1961. Do you recall what you did after that?

I promoted a number of subdivisions in town, and bought property.. in some cases sold lots to developers; some cases, built the homes and/or business establishments on the property.

Can you name me some of those housing facilities that you began?

Well, at St. Louis and Spencer there was 20 acres in there that were converted to lots, and the lots were sold out to a developer by the name of Minott. He built homes on the lots and then sold the homes. Out on East Charleston there's 40 acres of homes and commercial structures in there. It starts at the Thriftmart and so forth on East Charleston. We developed 40 acres of homes and triplexes in there, and the triplexes were later remodeled into commercial structures. We put in, along with a fellow by the name of Harry Polk, about 400 lots in Henderson that were later sold as trailer lots. In other words, we sold them the lot, and they installed their trailer on the lot. We did it under the name of Trailer Homes Investment Corporation. We bought the property, I believe, from the city of Henderson. They'd bought the property from the government, and we installed these trailer lots...60-by-150-foot lots.

Those are sizable.

Yes, and a regular subdivision lot, and they were sold out to people that owned trailers. They moved the trailers on the lots and hooked them up to the sewer and water and so forth.

What were some of your other developments?

Well, starting at Oakey Boulevard going north to Franklin Street on Fifth Street, Sixth Street, Seventh and a part of Eighth, we put in all of that development.

Did it have a name?

I'm sure it did, but I don't remember what the name of it was. The property was owned by the Park estate. I had to deal with Art Ham, the attorney who had been the attorney for the Parks for a number of years.

Was that the Dr. [William S.] Park, the dentist?

Yes. The one that had all the old Indian collections and so forth and so on. [He] later left that whole collection of artifacts and whatnot to the museum at Henderson. [The Clark County Southern Nevada Museum.]

It went down to Henderson?

Yes. But it was available for somebody to use here for years, and nobody would build the facilities to house it. There were arrow points; there were old Indian dress of all kinds and description; there were old mining rocks and exhibits. It was rather complete that he'd gathered up over a period of years and made into exhibits and so forth. Nobody, including the city fathers and whatnot, would get around to doing anything about it! That's what first started me thinking about the Frontier Village, really. They [the Park family] didn't want their exhibit to be a part of the Frontier Village or any part of a private collection. They wanted the city or the county or, you might say, a public entity to do something about it.

Had you made an offer to them?

I tried to get it for the Frontier Village, but they turned me down.

So you developed that property [the old Park land] then?

Yes.

How long were you in that kind of development?

Well, probably up until around 1970—from 1961 to 1970.

So you were nearing retirement, really.

Yes.

Did your company have a name?

No, it operated under various names—Consolidated Oil Investment, Trailer Homes Investment Corporation, various and sundry corporate names.

It was not just a local land development thing, then?

No.

You mentioned oil. Did you get into oil?

Yes. During that particular period I drilled a number of oil wells out of Grand Junction, Colorado—most of it in Utah—but Grand Junction, Colorado, was the base of operations. Got into mining promotions having to do with uranium bought and sold stock and actually operated a couple of uranium mines during this particular period.

I'd drilled several oil wells in Wyoming. It had been part of a promotion that I was involved in prior to coming to Las Vegas, and that's where my interest lay. I had built these

steel buildings in Seminole, Oklahoma; in Wink, Texas; and Hobbs, New Mexico.. all of them oil field boom towns.

As a consequence during that particular period I entered into leases on oil property. I drilled a number of wells— probably in excess of 300 of them in various states: Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, so forth.

So you really were the entrepreneur then, weren't you?

Well, I don't know whether I was what you called the...

Yes, I think that's what you'd call it! [laughter]

...but I was the promoter.

Looking through the newspapers in the mid-1950s I found a number of references to a development that you were proposing at the time called the Caribbean. That was going to be a casino or a club?

It was supposed to be a Hotel Caribbean. I put up option money [in 1954] to buy the property that starts at Spring Mountain Road and winds up at the Castaways and back to the apartment developments behind, which property I owned in there and built a 208 unit apartment unit called the Westchester Gardens. The property in front of it was owned by Roscoe Coffman, and I put up option money to acquire the property and hired a fellow by the name of Green, who was an architect for Tommy Hull in the early days.

That's the El Rancho man?

Yes. I hired him to make some preliminary designs on what was to be called the Caribbean Hotel. I carried the thing far enough to obtain

a verbal commitment for the financing of the Caribbean out of Equitable Life Insurance Company, and after I obtained it verbally from the company I was called by the first vice-president of Equitable, asking me to appear along with the architect and contractor in their eastern office to go over the whole project with the board of directors. I did contact the architect and the contractor, or what I was proposing to use as a contractor.

I happened to be on vacation in the New England states— in Boston—when they contacted me out of Las Vegas telling me that I had received this request to bring the architect and the contractor and appear before the board of Equitable. So I got hold of the architect and contractor and did meet them in New York. I came out of Boston, and Green came out of Los Angeles; the contractor came out of Salt Lake, I believe. While we were sitting in the anteroom of the board of directors at their principal office in New York, the Equitable board received word that [Glen] McCarthy—who was in the oil business and built that big hotel in Houston, Texas—had reneged on the payments of the hotel and had turned the hotel back to them. And as a consequence we never did get to meet with the board of Equitable because they had that big promotion that they had furnished the financing for thrown back in their lap by McCarthy.

That was the Shamrock Hotel, wasn't it?

Yes. That is the reason that the Caribbean was never built and didn't go forward.

You were going to have this Caribbean motif, a Latin motif?

Yes. It was designed along those lines. [It] had about 300 rooms in it and so forth and so on.

And you actually had the plans and everything drawn?

Well, I had the preliminary plans. [The plans are deposited in Special collections, the James Dickinson Library, University of Nevada Las Vegas.] The promotion, getting it up to that point, cost me out of my pocket probably \$65,000 to \$70,000, and I just had to throw it out the window.

Well, I read about the Caribbean. it sounded like a marvelous idea, and I wondered what happened. Now we know.

You were involved in another enterprise that kind of fascinates me and seems a little out of character for you. I hear that you were responsible for the potato industry in Winnemucca.

I won't say that I was responsible for it, but we had a company called Torginol Industries. It was a public company. All the stock was gotten together by me. I got out and promoted 11 people to join me, originally. We made a public stock issue—sold the stock in the state of Nevada ...sold 2 million shares.

For what purpose?

Well, it was general. The SEC [Securities Exchange Commission] was concerned. They made us quit using the word "investment" due to the 1934 law that prohibited investment companies doing certain things or certain companies being called an investment company when in reality they weren't an investment company. So they stopped us from doing certain advertising along those lines, and we didn't call it an investment company. Originally it was called Western Industries, Incorporated, and there was a public company called Western Industries. I

didn't know it at the time; it just so happened that the company was not organized in the state of Nevada—didn't have a license in the state of Nevada—and as a consequence I had no way of knowing about it. So after we got to selling stock I became cognizant that there was a public stock company called Western Industries, so we had to change the name. We were selling a floor covering called Torginol. That's when we changed the name from Western Industries to Torginol Industries.

That explains the name.

We sold 2 million shares. [The] first, probably, 250,000 shares were sold at a dollar. Then the balance of the stock was sold at \$2 a share, and we sold 2 million shares in Nevada and started the floor covering business and whatnot.

The name change occurred about the time of the potato business. There was a little farmer out of Idaho that had come into Diamond Valley, which is out of Eureka, Nevada. Diamond Valley has got a lot of public land in it—that is, land that was owned by the government—and the people filed on the land under either the Pittman Act or some means of filing on the land. They had put in farms, drilled wells and planted a certain amount of acreage and so forth. Anyway, this farmer came out of Idaho and managed to either buy or lease 2 or 3 sections of land in Diamond Valley, and he had planted russet potatoes in Diamond Valley. Well, Diamond Valley is a poor area in one respect: it's rich land; there's water under the land available for irrigating and so forth, but it is out of Eureka—it's about 6,600 feet in elevation. Doesn't look it if you look at the map, but it is, and as a consequence, many years you plant your farm crops and you'll have them going good in the first part of May, and many's the

time at that altitude they will wind up with another storm. As a consequence, it usually gets up just about to blooming stage, and here comes the storm, and it'll freeze.

There went your crops.

So it wasn't a good area for that standpoint, but the particular year that this fellow planted these potatoes in there everything was perfect. The weather stayed perfect, and as a consequence he grew some of the finest russet potatoes you ever saw in your life, sacked them and put them in a warehouse up there. So we heard about it. Then potatoes were just edging up in price.

I had been involved at one time in leasing, planting and harvesting wheat in west Texas along with my grandfather. We had 8 sections of wheat one year, and we had 12 sections another year, and we had 20 some sections another year. So the farming business was not a new thing to me.

You weren't always a city boy in the casinos.

I knew that [Harry] Fletcher was the head mogul or the head of First Western Savings and Loan. I felt that under any reasonable submittal at all, Mr. Fletcher would be interested in promoting the potato business. I knew that his family had been involved in the potato business, having grown potatoes in and around Carson City for years. Very few people around here knew it, but my work on the Nevada Tax Commission in Carson City had acquainted me with several things that a lot of people didn't know.

So I was sure that we could get this land in Diamond Valley for next to nothing—that is, lease it. The wells were drilled; they had to be drilled in order for them to get the land from the government. Most of the wells didn't

have any pumps in them, but the land was there and had been cleared. That was part of obtaining the land from the government: they had to clear the land, and it had all been plowed and tilled, and in some cases planted.

Anyway, under the name of Western Industries—and I was the president of the company—we obtained a lease on this land, 4 sections. And it was the heart of the whole Diamond Valley. We had property out in the present airport area; we had property joining Houssel's ranch which we later developed into lots and sold the lots. There are big, beautiful homes out there on it at the present time. That was done under the name of Western Industries.

We had enough property and enough holdings that I felt that I could go to Fletcher and propose a loan and get the money. So before going to Fletcher I proposed it to the board of directors: "Take these 4 sections; lease them." I had in writing the lease price, which was, you might say, a give-away price—\$20 an acre. The board of directors OK'd it, providing I could obtain the money in the form of a loan to buy the machinery—the well pumps, the irrigating equipment and so forth—and put the crops in.

I went to Fletcher with a deal. He asked me how much money we were going to need, and I told him \$2 million. "Well," he said, "What do you got as collateral?" I told him the various properties that Western Industries owned and whatnot. He said, "Well, bring the deeds in here and we got the loan."

So I said, "When do you want me to bring them in?"

He said, "Well, you can do it now."

To make a long story short, before the afternoon was over I had the money.

We bought the machinery in Sacramento [and] moved it in there. The labor in and around that country up there had been

working in the mines, but there was plenty of labor that knew the farming end of the business. So we bought the tractors, bought the plows and the disc and the planters and so forth and plowed, harrowed and disked those 2,400 acres. Bought the pumps; had all the irrigating equipment up there and whatnot.

They got into a big donnybrook in Western Industries. I later sued the company and wanted judgment against the company. The directors originally agreed to trade stock on the apartment house project [Westchester Gardens] for stock of Western Industries. Unbeknownst to me the board of directors, promoted by a lawyer out of Los Angeles and one of the stock salesmen, started holding meetings secretly, and, to make a long story short, they rescinded their action and refused to go forward with the trade even though we had the stock, and they tied up the stock in transfer.

Now, this stock was to be exchanged for stock in the potato investment?

No, in Western Industries. In other words, the apartment house stock was to be traded for Western Industries stock, which later became Torginol Industries. So they tied it up in transfer, refused to go forward with the project, refused to assume control of the apartment house, and as one director, I couldn't go forward with. At the same time they had rescinded action on this trade, they also rescinded their action on going ahead with the potato project.

Do you know why?

I never have known why. As I say, later I sued the company. I got a \$1.8 million judgment against them, and by the time I got the judgment—it took 6 years to get it through

court—the company was broke. There wasn't any way to collect on my judgment, so it didn't do me much good to have the judgment.

You had a million dollars on paper.

That's right. But a lot of this stuff, like the apartment house, I was involved in personally. And it broke me, or it bit me awful bad towards being broke. But we got that far with the potato project. In other words, we plowed, harrowed and disked the 2,400 acres. We bought all of the irrigating equipment, including the pumps for all the wells that had been drilled on the property—the irrigating pumps and equipment were stored on a lot in Eureka, Nevada, which is approximately 20 miles from the farm in Diamond Valley—and the seed potatoes had been bought. We hadn't taken delivery of same. They'd been bought in Bakersfield, California, from a firm. Two brothers organized this firm; their name is Hawkins. They dealt in seed potatoes, and we had bought the seed potatoes from them but hadn't taken delivery. They wouldn't deliver the seed potatoes without being paid for them the day they delivered, and naturally First Western had received notification of the action, and they weren't inclined to turn loose of the money.

[laughter] You were just between a rock and a hard spot, weren't you?

I was between a rock and a hard spot. But during this time we hired... I say hired; we didn't have to pay anything for it—they did it for nothing. The University of California at Davis, which is essentially the agricultural end of the University of California, did all the testing of the soil, the water, the potatoes and so forth, and had written a complete report—must be that thick [gestures].

About an inch and a half.

You've never seen such complete agricultural engineering in your life. And they had agreed to send a professor and a certain number of their students to supervise the planting and the watering and the amount of water and the type of fertilizer and the amount of fertilizer and so forth. They agreed to put these people in there without one quarter on the part of anybody connected with the company, just as a means of furthering the education of the students out of the University of California. So we had a lot of help. I had gone so far as to sell to the navy and to the army all the potatoes out of this 2,400 acres.

You had sold the potatoes before they were planted?

Yes, and had a commitment out of the army and the navy. I didn't think that we wanted to go through with it, but I had them sold for \$4 a hundred, which was a hell of a price then. Today it wouldn't be such a good price, but then it was a terrific price. The reason that we didn't think that we wanted to go through with it, or at least I didn't think we wanted to go through with it, was the fact that it became obvious that those potatoes were going up in price in excess of \$4 a hundred. To be perfectly frank, the U.S. number ones went to \$12.75 before that summer was over with, and we would have been able to get an average of around \$8 a hundred for these potatoes had we gone ahead with the project. Naturally we wouldn't have wanted to go forward with the \$4 commitment...that's all that the army and the navy would agree to pay for the potatoes.

It was an open-end contract; we could either deliver them at \$4 a hundred, or tell them that we wouldn't deliver them. So, we didn't have to go forward with the contract

if we didn't want to, which was an ideal contract for us or for Western Industry. As it turned out, had they not rescinded their action on the deal, the weather was such that it wouldn't have given us any trouble. We had so much professional help that you couldn't have helped but grown the potatoes, and we could've netted after income tax and everything approximately \$2 million on that 2,400 acres and taken the company completely out of debts of all kinds and descriptions. But, of course, your hindsight's always better than your foresight, and I guess the directors didn't think they knew this at the time. I thought I knew it, but I couldn't prove it to them because, naturally, it hadn't been done.

Anyway, that's what got the interest started. Some of the people involved later got over into around Winnemucca, where the land is the same quality as in Diamond Valley— U.S. number one soil—but the altitude is some 3,500 to 4,200 feet and not 6,600 feet.

That makes a great deal of difference.

Later, one of these people involved took 600 acres over there and planted and harvested russet potatoes of f of his 600 acres, and he had the same beautiful potatoes that were grown in Diamond Valley. In other words, the potato is greater in mass and density than any potato that's ever been produced even in Idaho, and Idaho's producing damn fine russet potatoes. These out of Diamond Valley that we had tested were far in excess of any potatoes that had been grown in Idaho, and the potatoes out of Winnemucca have been just as good as the ones that were grown in Diamond Valley. So eventually, in my opinion, we'll have a terrific industry in this state of growing russet potatoes in some of these valleys.

But that's how I got involved in the potato business. First Western didn't lose any money on it, but it cost Western Industries a fortune backing out of all these contracts. And I, for the life of me, will never, never understand why it was done.

You were on the board.

I was on the board. I was the president of the board of directors.

But they operated behind your back?

Yes.

Well, that certainly was a disappointment because I'm sure you regarded some of these people as friends.

Longtime friends.

Yes. The business world is pretty cutthroat, isn't it?

Yes, it is. But it had happened to me before, and I presume if I live another 15 years it'll probably happen again.

You mentioned in passing a while ago having been in Carson City in conjunction with your work in the gaming commission. It wasn't the gaming commission then. Do you want to go into that?

Well, Ben Siegel, known as Bugs Siegel—I never called him that; he was Ben Siegel as far as I was concerned—had been, by reputation, a part of Murder, Incorporated. A number of articles [were] written about he and people associated with him. [He] started having trouble in the gambling business from the standpoint of the operation of the race

books and who controlled the race wires or the information—controlled the race books. Siegel came in here out of the East and had been sent in here to sit on the race wire in the state. Of course, originally, there wasn't much business; there weren't too many operators that wanted into the betting end of horse racing. So, as a consequence, for years they operated here and caused no trouble.

He was sent in here when it became obvious that the town was progressing, that more and more establishments were being built, that more and more hotels had been built and were to be built. He was sent in here to control the race wire and control who got it and who didn't get it and so forth and so on. It became obvious when that fight started developing; people that had had the race wire for years all of a sudden could not get the race wire, and people that nobody had ever heard of wound up with the race wire [with] Siegel calling the shots. It became obvious to those of us who had been in business here in town that, if somebody didn't get control of this business, sooner or later there was going to be no business.

It was being controlled by the county commission or the city commission and/or the sheriff, and the licensing was handled in a very loose-shod manner. They'd go to the sheriff and say, "I'm going to build a hotel out here. I'm going to build a gambling casino, and I'm going to need a license." And in many parts of the state the sheriff would say, "Well, when I have certain monies cross my hands, why, you'll have the license."

They actually said that?

Well, it was going on all over the state. We knew it was going on, but it wasn't any particular concern...had never given any appreciable trouble.

It became obvious that people came in that didn't deserve to be here, and what caused them to come was our efforts in promoting the town and promoting the area and so forth. Naturally they were in a position, due to their operations in the East, to be able to come with monies that other people couldn't come with—cash money. We knew that if the sheriff hadn't accepted it, he was going to start accepting, and instead of being \$25,000 it would be \$100,000 and then it would get up to 2, and it would finally get to where those were the only people that were going to be in the business.

I had gotten the operators together here [and] presented what I considered was the problem. We had another problem in that every session of the legislature we were being taxed, taxed, taxed, and the legislature prior to this wrote a tax bill, and they were going to tax us 10 percent of the gross. Well, most businesses—and the gambling business, if it's operated on the square—cannot stand 10 percent of the gross without any other expenses out against it.

That's a big slice off of the top.

That's a big slice off of the top, and where you've got to promote the business—you've got to hire the entertainment and pay for it in order to get the people in here, and promote them to drive from 300 to 500 miles or ride an airplane from 300 to 500 miles and more—you cannot afford 10 percent of the gross. It will place it to where you're not making any money. So I had appeared in Carson City as a lobbyist, so to speak, for the other operators, and with facts and figures and so forth. We had never taken any money off of the top. If you're giving 10 percent of the true gross, that's one thing; if you're giving 10 percent of what you say the gross is, why, that's something else.

Depending on which set of books you look at.

That's right.

We had gotten the bill pulled down within reason and so forth and the tax set within reason in the legislature the prior year period. So when we started having this obvious trouble from the standpoint of Siegel and/or others having to do with the race wire, I got the other operators together, presented the problem, and they agreed to put up certain monies for, you might say, lobbying for me to hire lawyers if necessary and so forth.

I'd gone and presented the problem to the governor of the state, who was Vail Pittman at the time, and told him that I felt that there was going to have to be a means set up to control this business and to control the licensing of same, and it was going to have to be handled by some means of state government and some committee of the state government that in no way would be interested in the payoff of any kind. I told him at the time I could figure only one such board in the state could control such a thing, and no member such board, in my opinion, would be interested in a payoff. They already had all the money they could possibly ever spend, and there was no reason for them to want any payoff. He asked me what board I felt that was, and I told him the Nevada Tax Commission.

The members on the Tax Commission [were all wealthy]. One of them owned a fourth of the land up at Lake Tahoe. His father had gotten it before him—came in here in a covered wagon. One of the people out of Elko owned, by his own admission and that of others, some 30,000 head of cattle—cattle, sheep and animals—owned tremendous ranches. Another one on the board owned approximately 8 big ranches and owned 2 hotels. Another one on the board had for years operated and owned the Ford franchise

in Reno and surrounding territory: Reno, Sparks, so forth. He had made several million dollars out of the business. He had used that to go into ranches, and I personally had steered him into one wherein he agreed to pay for 6,000 head of cattle and wound up getting 12,000 head. Nobody had bothered to count them for years, even including the Nevada Tax Commission! [laughter]

Well, that was a nice trick.

But anyway, these people didn't need the money, and I didn't feel that they would be subject to a buy-off... and would be insulted by such an approach. Well, the governor was very jumpy about it. He didn't know whether these people would be interested, and he wasn't sure he could get it in there, but he would entertain the notion and go forward with the deal providing I could get [it] out of the attorney general, who happened to be Bible at the time.

Alan Bible.

Yes. I could get an opinion out of him that the Nevada Tax Commission had the authority to do such a thing. So I went to Bible and explained the whole situation and told him the reason behind it, and Bible said, "Well, what do you want me to do?"

I said, "Well, if you feel that it's within reason for the Nevada Tax Commission to take on the supervision of the gambling business in the state, within reason for them to take on the licensing of the various gambling establishments, then I want you to write a letter to the governor and/or the Nevada Tax Commission so saying."

"I'll write the letter; when do you want it?"

I said, "I want it tomorrow morning." He wrote the letter, and I said, "I don't want to

deliver it. I want you to either deliver it, or I want you to mail it out."

He said, "I'll deliver it to the governor." He did.

The governor called me in and said, "I've got the letter, so we'll present it to the Tax Commission." He said, "I would like for you to appear before the Tax Commission and explain the same reasons that you gave to me. You being an operator, you must have a reason for bringing it."

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Our next meeting is at such-and-such a time, and would you be there?"

I said, "Yes, I'll be there." I did appear before the Nevada Tax Commission. I did present my reasons for wanting them to take over the issuance of the gambling licenses and control the gambling in the state.

Part of that time, there hadn't been any licensing, really, had there?

Yes, the licensing was handled by the individual county commissions and city commissions along with the sheriff of the respective county.

But each one of them had their own criteria.

That's right. There was no overall interest in the business as far as on a state level.

But when the mob begins to be interested and the industry's growing, then you have to be careful, don't you?

You had to be careful. They asked many a question. One of the members of the Tax Commission at the time, a man by the name of Wallace Parks, was a director of the First National Bank and was a rancher by trade. [He] owned a number of acres in the Lake

Tahoe general area and has since built a hotel on some of the property owned by he and his family. He seemed to be the most interested out of the whole group of commissioners. He asked the most questions...other than the governor.

The governor and Mr. Parks both stated that they felt that it the Tax Commission took over the task of licensing the gambling operators in the state, took over the task of supervising the industry and keeping it honest—or as honest as it was possible to keep it—that it was going to be necessary to have somebody on the Nevada Tax Commission representing the business that had an interest in the business and could give the other commissioners certain inside information into the business so that they wouldn't make too many mistakes in trying to establish their control over the industry. I said, "Well, I think you've got a good idea there, and I agree with you. I think that it would be better if you had somebody on the commission.

So before I left the room, the governor, Vail Pittman, including Mr. Parks and some of the other commissioners, asked if I were appointed to the commission if I would accept the appointment. I said, "I would rather not, but if you would insist on it, and if it is the only way that I can get the Tax Commission to assume the obligation of the supervision of the industry, then I will of necessity have to tell you that I will accept if appointed."

Mr. Parks, who was very vocal on the matter, stated that only under the condition that I did accept would he be interested in assuming the obligation. So the governor agreed with him and stated that he felt the same way, also. So with that, that broke up the meeting. Later, I was appointed to the commission when there was a vacancy on the commission.¹

The time I presented this was during the session of the legislature, so certain bills were introduced in the legislature that made it possible for the Tax Commission to assume the obligation or the supervision on the issuing of licenses and so forth. And certain bills were passed and so forth that essentially took the governor off the hot seat for having stated that the commission was going to take over the supervision of the industry and did so on the basis of taxes. In other words, if they were going to ask the industry to pay more and more taxes, then the commission was going to have to know more about the industry and was going to have to enter into it and know what they were taxing and what they weren't taxing and what the industry was doing.

That would also allow them to know who the leaders were.

This is true. It would also allow certain supervision over the taxes from not allowing bills to be proposed that were absolutely ridiculous and impossible to live up to.

There was a commissioner on there representing railroads, and I do not remember now which commissioner did represent railroads, but there was one on there.

That's on the Tax Commission?

Yes, and he was very vocal in wanting somebody out of the industry on the commission because he stated at the time that the railroads had for years been accused of having their own way, and he felt that if the gambling industry was represented that it would take part of the heat away from the railroads.

Relieving them of some of the tax burden?

That's right. He was right. So anyway, that is the start of the supervision of the gambling industry in the state of Nevada.

How long did you serve on the Tax Commission?

I served until my time ran out, and I believe it was in 1949 when my time ran out.

Did you enjoy that work?

Yes, I did. It allowed me to meet people in the state that I'd have no way of ordinarily meeting and allowed me to know more about the whole state and what went on in the state.

You traveled a great deal?

All over the state. We had meetings in Carson City at least once a month; sometimes here, but mostly in Carson City. Sometimes in Reno, but mostly all the meetings were at that time held in Carson City. Recently they've been held here, in Carson, in Reno, in Elko and so forth.

Do you remember when the gambling commission [Nevada Gaming Commission] per se was set up?

It was after I left the Nevada Tax Commission.

It was a result, wasn't it, of the gaming industry growing so large?

It became impossible for the Nevada Tax Commission to supervise because of the number of people that were trying to enter the business, and that's the reason that the other branch of it was created.

Were there other people like yourself as concerned about the direction that gaming was taking?

Yes, there were quite a number.

Can you mention some of them?

Well, I would say practically every operator in the state was interested, even Mr. [Gus] Greenbaum, who was the president of the Flamingo organization.

So the industry wanted to have itself regulated?

In tact, they told me that—all over the United States—any time it was not sufficiently regulated it was eventually voted down. And as a consequence, they were as interested in having the controls as the outsiders.

Yes. They had to be as pure as Caesar's wife, right?

Yes. They had to live up to what the church group expected of them. That's the way they felt about it.

And so regulation would do that and ultimately get rid of the mob.

Maybe not ultimately get rid of the mob as such, but it would place some control over what was being done and what wasn't being done, and what was being allowed and what was not being allowed. Get a group of people together, and if we would build the outside of the structure for a casino, bar and restaurant in conjunction with the motel. He would take a lease on the structure at this point and cause the interior to be put in along this theme of the Showboat for a casino, bar and restaurant. We tentatively made a deal with him— Joe Kelly, who's now president of the Showboat operation. And he brought 2 people in with him.

Who were they?

Both of them were in the used car business here in Las Vegas at the time. I do not remember their names; however, their names are in the early promotion advertising and, I'm sure, can be gotten together. They, in turn, made a deal with a group out of the Desert Inn, and they had the interior designed by studio designers and architects. I don't know that there was an actual architect in the group, but they had to have an architect sign the original documents. What arrangement was made along those lines, I do not know, but they did have the studio designers.

What do you mean, studio designers?

Well, every one of the major picture studios in Hollywood and the Los Angeles general area all had [design] departments. These designers have got a complete library—a very extensive library—of pictures and drawings and blueprints and so forth and so on; it's a very elaborate filing system, and these designers design these sets for the motion pictures. They happened to catch the designers on a strike on the studios, which allowed them the use of the whole group of them. As a consequence, they probably got more authentic work done quicker than they would have gotten done had this strike not been going on.

That was a lucky break.

Yes. But anyway, they designed the complete interior, including the casino, the bar, the restaurant, the bingo parlor and so forth. And, naturally, [they] kept submitting it to me for approval before they were allowed to go ahead and build. They did go ahead and build and finished up and opened, naturally, at the same time we opened the room part of the hotel. They didn't want to operate [all] of this

structure. [They] were principally interested in the gambling end of the operation. So the lease was later revised, and we—that is, the hotel corporation—operated the bar and the restaurant and the room section, and they essentially operated the gambling end of the business.

That was in about 1961?

Nineteen sixty-one was when I sold out, but we opened the structure in 1954.

The day before the opening you had a big rainstorm here, didn't you?

Yes, we did.

I read a newspaper account that said there were several inches of rain out there and that the Showboat indeed looked like a Showboat for a short time!

That was the most water I've ever seen in the valley. If we ever get that type of a rain again, there's going to be a lot of trouble in Las Vegas because they closed up

And without the volume you don't do any good. It's like for years they operated the restaurant at the El Cortez, and Bob Baskin didn't make any money with it because he didn't seat any people. So when we remodeled the El Cortez we put in a restaurant that was 4 times as big as anything they'd ever had in there. Mr. Baskin, who moved out when we moved in, personally told me that we were making the biggest mistake we'd ever made in our lives; there was no way that that hotel could ever accommodate that number of seats in a restaurant. Well, as a consequence we not only did accommodate the number of seats, but we had people waiting as high as 4 hours

in order to get into the seats in order to get something to eat at the hotel. Instead of doing a volume of \$27,000 a month that he'd been doing, we started doing a volume of \$88,000, \$102,000, \$120,000. So naturally we had no waste; we had no throwaway out the back door. As a consequence we started making money in the restaurant that had never made money in the history of the operation.

Did Baskin stay in town?

Yes. He's dead now.

Well, we got into this discussion talking about the chamber and....

So I felt that the reason I got interested in the chamber is that I was involved in promotions all over the United States in the resort business, and I knew that if we got Las Vegas up where it should be and developed Las Vegas where it should go, that we were going to have to put in innumerable hours on end promoting. And the only people that can promote it as such is a chamber of commerce. It's got to be everybody in the community doing it, not just a few people.

There was no chamber in Las Vegas, then?

There had always been a chamber, but it had always been run by a few individuals in town, and nobody else would spend an hour or a day trying to help, too. It was a chamber in the name only. It did not have the interest of the people or the town at heart. Frankly, it was something to provide a job for 1 or 2 individuals, but essentially that's about it. In other words, keep track of a few businesses and how many restaurants there were, and how many hotel rooms there were and so forth and so on. Just typical organizations, so to speak.

So that was my interest in the chamber. I had had to have a similar interest all over the country. I helped organize a chamber in Hobbs, New Mexico; I helped to organize one in Wink, Texas; I helped organize one in Seminole, Oklahoma, when I was, you might say, nothing but a kid. I was still in school. I was induced to do these things by my uncles who felt I had the ability to do it and the education to do it and the motivation.

Well, how did you sort of build a fire under the chamber here?

It was done by building a fire under the individuals. One of the greatest people that ever existed for the town was a fellow by the name of Max Kelch. He is now passed away; he owned a radio station.

Do you know what station?

Well, KENO. He originally came in here promoting the station. He had to do a lot of promoting in order to exist as a radio operator, and he was a very smart individual, highly educated in both the mechanics and/or public speaking. He knew the fiscal end of business operations better than any living human I ever knew. He could give a better address than the average person I've ever run into and do it extemporaneously. He didn't have to have 9 million notes—he'd just stand up and start talking. So we motivated him, and there was a reason for his motivation; we felt that if he could get all this stuff done and build it up, why, it was a buildup for the radio business and for, eventually, the television business. He made a fortune off of it here in Las Vegas. He built a home out in Rancho Circle. His wife still lives there. They had 2 fine youngsters who are grown up and married locally.

Didn't you become an officer in the Chamber of Commerce?

Oh, yes. I was the president of the chamber at one time.

Max Kelch had preceded you as president.

He did. He served 2 terms as president of the chamber. I think he probably could serve forever as the president of the chamber had he wished to, but he felt that others ought to occupy the seat, which is rightly so.

What did you and Max Kelch do to get people enthusiastic?

We got to holding meetings, and we had various talkers at these meetings. We promoted the Union Pacific Railroad. It had never been promoted before.

How do you mean you promoted it?

Well, the Union Pacific came through here; Las Vegas was an important cog on their railroad. They were hauling tons and tons of freight and passengers through here. The then president [probably George Ashby] of the Union Pacific Railroad lived in Las Vegas. Nobody had ever bothered to contact him, but we did contact him. He made the publicity department of the Union Pacific Railroad available to the chamber. He made personnel that they had hired and paid available to the chamber.

They were already spending money promoting the area, promoting their railroad, promoting the route and so forth. We felt that they would be interested in additional promotion that would help their railroad, and we felt that if Las Vegas got built up and they got to bringing many more customers

in here, that would promote their railroad and whatnot. As a consequence they were very interested, and they made all of the stuff available. They didn't charge us one cent. They did a lot of printing for us. They had a Union Pacific magazine, and they published many an article in that magazine about the area and things that went on.

You just had an untapped resource there that you'd never used.

That's right...never been used. They owned the water company in the town, and we felt it to their advantage and the advantage of the town if somebody besides the Union Pacific owned the water company. We felt that it ought to be owned publicly, and we told him so. He agreed with us, and the water company was later turned over and made a part of the public entity—the [Las Vegas] Valley Water District.

Without water you cannot promote an area. You must have water. The land is here. It couldn't run off, but, naturally, the Union Pacific Railroad wasn't interested in spending a small fortune...they had all the water they could use. They weren't going to develop it, so when we approached the subject, they were very interested and started helping us write the bills and take the thing over. So that got the water available publicly, and as a consequence had been able to go to the lake and bring in one big pipe line. Now they're in the process of bringing in a second big pipe line, and they're still going to have to have more water in spite of that. But without that water this area could have never grown the way it has. It won't grow in the future unless they water it.

That was a good move. What else did you and Kelch do?

Well, we felt that not enough work had ever been done in the past [on] the roads; the roads had never been properly promoted. We were constantly looking on the fact that if they improved the roads out of California in towards Nevada that they were helping Nevada...helping Las Vegas. It became necessary to point out to the Los Angeles authorities that, yes, they were helping Nevada, but they were also helping California. They were helping California a lot more than they were helping Nevada in that they were making it easier for the people to get to them.

They were, after all, the original promoters—not Nevada. They needed more and more people to take over the land that had been promoted originally as apple, orange and grapefruit orchards. They used to run train after train after train on the Southern Pacific, on the Santa Fe, on the Union Pacific bringing trainloads of people out of the Midwest into California to take over those orchards—to buy the land. By improving the roads it was just adding to their original promotions that they had allowed to go begging for a number of years.

Help them develop their own country, then?

Yes, and they agreed with us and started improving the roads and started making the appropriations and started working with the appropriations.

How did you do this? Did you go directly to other chambers of commerce in California?

We went to the chambers in California. We went to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, which in turn has the funnel to the individual chamber of commerce's in the small individual communities. They could go to the legislature. We couldn't.

Then we originally set up what we called the Live Wire Fund. We got, you might say, the easy people, the people that knew the value of promotion and that would agree to make these contributions, or the ones that had made the contributions in the past. We got them to agree to put it in writing that they would contribute so much money a year towards the Live Wire Fund...publishing and advertising firms.

Did you have a chamber publication, or did you have releases for the newspapers and that kind of stuff?

No, we had somebody in charge of the Live Wire Fund that it was their duty to keep the newspapers and whatnot supplied with information and so forth.

So you had the individual companies make pledges every year.

They made pledges, and we got it set up. We had to have something, so we picked the Live Wire Fund. We went through Mr. Abe Miller, as an illustration. Mr. Miller was a highly conservative man, and had a highly conservative son, and they owned the Sal Sagev Hotel. Well, at one time he owned one of the banks in the area. When they got to criticizing him too much over some action on the city Commission—he was on the city commission—why, he then just resigned from the city commission and closed the bank. He wrote all the people and told them to come get their money.

In a little snit over some criticism? He was certainly an independent person, wasn't he?

Yes, he was independent. So I went to Mr. Miller, and I said, "Miller, here's what we've

done. We've gotten together approximately \$50,000 and probably off of this 50 you'll get another 50 rather easily, but we want you on this group of Live Wire contributors." Oh, no way! He wasn't going to put up any money for such things as the Chamber of Commerce. And I said, "Well, you interested in making money?"

"Oh, yes.

I said, "I can show you how you can make 4 times the money you've ever made just by changing the operation on your hotel, but you're going to have to get the people in here in order to sell them the rooms and the food and the booze. Unless you get them in here you'll never make the money."

"Well, how do I get them in here?"

I said, "By joining the rest of us and promoting them in, and here's what we're going to do."

"Well, all right, if that's what you're going to do, then I'll put up the money."

So he put up \$1,000. He just turned around at his desk and wrote a check and handed me the check for \$1,000 made payable to the Live Wire, and said, "There's more behind that. You prove to me that you're going to do it."

Well, the old-timers around here just swore that there was no way that he could have done that. I said, "There's the man's check."

He was a hard nut to crack. They all knew that. [laughter]

That's right. So we went to person after person.

Were there many people like that?

Oh, there was a lot of them. [There was] a man, Ed Clark, that owned the original First State Bank that later became the Bank of Nevada. He called me down there—sent

for me when we started building the hotel. No way did he want that hotel built in here.

You mean the Last Frontier?

Yes! He didn't want it.

Why?

Just said they'd gotten along pretty good the way they were going and just didn't need it.

You mean he actually called you down to the office and verbalized that?

Yes! I said, "Well, you just do as you please, but we're going to build it whether you like it or not."

"Well," he said, "I happen to be the head of the Democratic party in the state, and I am here to tell you that with this war going and whatnot I'm just going to stop you."

I said, "Well, you just grab a deep seat and a tight rein because you're not going to stop me."

"Well, we'll see," [he said]. So later he called me and he said, "My father always told me, 'if you can't whip 'em, join 'em,' and I got to join you."

He was big enough to admit he had made a mistake.

So he started contributing. Well, they just said it's impossible. I said, "There's the man's check and it's coming in here every month."

Then we went to Cyril Wengert. He was the manager of the First National Bank. "We want your money, Cyril."

Well, it just couldn't be. The bank couldn't put up that kind of money.

I said, "I happen to know that they can, and if you don't want to contact them, I'm going to."

"Well, no, let me do it," he said, "Give me the information," which I had all written up by then.

So we handed it to him and gave him a week, and said, "Either you contact the board, get something done about it, or we're going to them ourselves."

"Oh, I'll contact them," [he said].

So he did, and I got a call out of Reno from the president of the First National. He said, "No, Mr. Moore, we just can't put up this money. We'd be expected to do it in Reno, Las Vegas and Elko."

I said, "Yes, you should be doing it in every one of those places you're talking about."

"Well," he finally said, "I'll be down there next week, and I'll talk to you." He finally did agree to put up, I think, \$10,000 to start with, and then later agreed that they would do so much money a month, and then they did it for years.

Did you have to pay for a membership at that time?

Yes. It wasn't any part of the membership. It didn't have anything to do with the membership. This was a fund to promote this town—bring people in here—[and] promote the resort industry.

Later I contacted Cyril Wengert, and I said, "Cyril, it seems you've done pretty good."

He said, "Last week I sold that piece of property I had up there on Fremont Street. I got more money than I thought I ever would see in my whole lifetime out of that piece of property."

I said, "Yes, let me tell you something—you just asked about a fourth of what it was worth."

Well, he liked to faint. He just couldn't believe that I would think that, and I sat down there and attempted to prove it to him.

Later he called me into the bank one day and said, "Yes, I agree. I could've gotten 4 times what I did get, and I made a mistake." Later on he didn't make many mistakes, and he made a lot of money here in real estate that he owned.

[laughter] How many terms did you serve in the chamber?

I think I served 2 terms. Max Kelch served 2.

Yes. You 2 got the chamber launched in the direction of promotion and exploitation of what we had here.

The Union Pacific Railroad later came in with the idea if we'd set this thing up in a little different way, that they would contribute some \$200,000 to \$300,000 a year to the fund. We asked them what they were talking about, and they wanted it set up in the form of a bureau like it was a public entity. So, they called it Desert Sea [News Bureau]. I think it's still called the same thing. But, anyway, it had to be taken away from Las Vegas, you see, to where their contributions would not be to Las Vegas or to Reno, but it would be to a public interest. Then they got away with contributing.

They provided a fellow by the name of [Steve] Hannigan for one full year, and Hannigan was one of the most expensive publicity men in the United States. You couldn't even talk to the man for less than \$300,000 in the way of a salary. They provided him free of charge. He came here to Las Vegas, set the whole thing up, told us what they wanted, handled the supervision of the

publicity, and set up a complete department of pictures. In other words, a newspaper any place in the world can write in there and [ask for] a picture of the hotel, this hotel or that hotel or this area or that area. That department is still functioning.²

It was to that news bureau, then, that the Union Pacific gave its money and not to the chamber.

And they're still doing it. As an illustration, if Union Pacific gave \$300,000 to the chamber in Las Vegas, then you know there where you got the principal office in Omaha, Nebraska, they're going to have to give them \$300,000. Yet if they appropriated \$300,000 out of the Union Pacific into the Desert Sea News Bureau, then they don't have to give to every news bureau in the country. They gave it to a news bureau. They wanted a different name, and they wanted it disconnected with the Chamber of Commerce and didn't want it in the same building, and for years it wasn't. I don't know whether it is now or not; I haven't paid any attention for the last 10 years.

But it did enable you to do what you wanted to do? You were able to carry out the promotional ideas that you had?

That's right. We could contribute a certain amount of money to the news Bureau, and the news bureau could then use it for photographs, for hiring of publicity people. In advertising they could have plates made up, they could have the art work done, they could have all this stuff ready so that if it's needed by a newspaper or magazine or whatnot ...bang! It's ready.

It was an organization to implement your promotion?

That's right. That's the way it's going at the present time, and as a consequence the chamber was able to get way more than its fair share out of the publicity and advertising department than if they had attempted to set up a fund and then gone and bought as an individual. They got help that you couldn't get any other way.

You've seen a lot of changes in Las Vegas. Do you care to comment?

Well, it's just started.

You're an optimist, aren't you?

It'll make more money from now on than ever has been made up to now.

What do you think about the prospect of legalized gambling in other states? It's already begun in New Jersey.

It'll only help. We're going to have to keep promoting, but I don't think it'll hurt.

Do you think Florida—if it had legalized gambling— would be more of a threat than the gambling that's now going on in New Jersey?

No. I think they'll take off a lot of money in Florida. I don't believe that it will ever come to pass in Florida because I don't think they can ever get rid of the jealousy among the operators long enough to get it done.

I would think that one of the big problems in Florida would be the very conservative, retired population there that would not vote for gaming. I would see that as a real problem.

The reason they were able to do it in New Jersey is that it's all separated in an entity that

the average person living in New Jersey never goes there. It's always the business. That isn't true in Florida.

One thing about the Florida weather: it's much more humid than ours, and I would think—speaking for myself— a humid weather would not attract me, and I would think that here, even though it does get hot, it's a more tolerable heat.

It is.

Well, at least we agree on that. If we can convince other travelers, we have it made.

If we don't keep promoting....

You think that's the key to it all?

That's right.

NOTES

1. William Moore was appointed to the Nevada Tax Commission in April, 1947. Since Mr. Moore was in the gaming business there was some skepticism among those who did not know him regarding his ability to regulate the industry without being self-serving. Robbins E. Cahill, in his oral history, made the following comment regarding Mr. Moore's personal integrity:

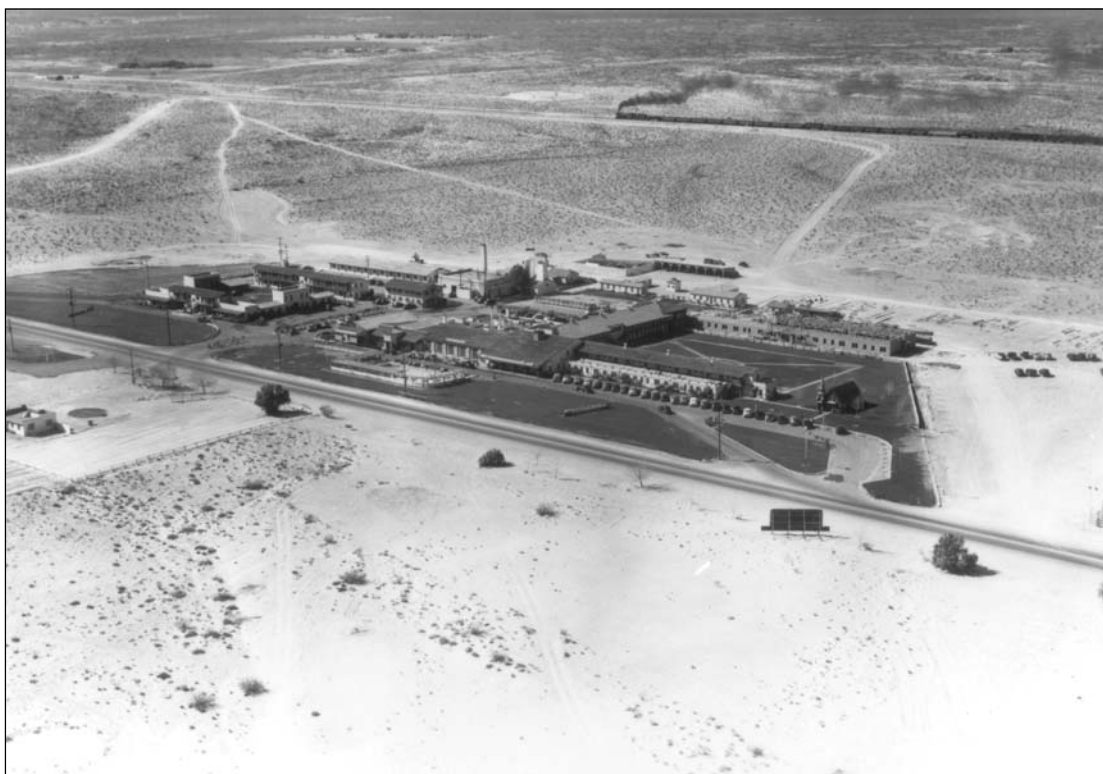
I think, personally, that the state of Nevada has a debt of gratitude that it owes to Bill Moore for what he did, because he did a yeoman job of it. I have found out since, as I've become acquainted in Las Vegas and the area, that probably he wasn't the only one that had conceived all of this, [but] he was the one that carried it out. He worked on it very vigorously, and he was in a very bad position, himself, because he was a gaming operator himself. And in trying to control other people, immediately, of course, it would be pointed out that he was trying to keep competition out. And I, personally, could guarantee that

Bill Moore never had that in mind. He had the state of Nevada's interests at heart; he saw how big this thing was going to be. He was occasionally in that awkward position, but I never knew him to act on anything, or suggest anything, strictly for his own personal good. I think he did a marvelous job in this respect, and I don't think most people realize just how important he was to the state of Nevada at that particular period. He just—in the Tax Commission—just literally fought it out by himself.

2. Steve Hannigan owned a public relations company and was employed by the Harriman family of the Union Pacific Railroad to promote the Sun Valley ski resort in Idaho, which was on the railroad line. A one-year contract was signed in 1948, and Ken Frogley was sent to Las Vegas to become the first manager of the Desert Sea News Bureau. The contract was not renewed, and the news organization set up by Hannigan reverted back to the Las Vegas Chamber of

Commerce and was named the Las Vegas News Bureau. It remains an adjunct of the chamber. The Hannigan agency had national prominence and promoted Miami Beach and the Indianapolis 500 race. [Information from Don Payne, Las Vegas News Bureau, 2 January 1985.]

PHOTOGRAPHS



The Last Frontier Hotel, 1945, one of the first developments on what was to become the Las Vegas Strip



Guests relaxing beside the swimming pool of the Last Frontier Hotel, 1945.



Opening night of the Last Frontier Village, 30 September 1950.



The Little Church of the West of the grounds of the Last Frontier Hotel



Opening of the Carrillo Room. (left to right)
Joe Schramm, Burt Walsh, Maxine Lewis,
Bill Moore, Leo Carrillo, Burt King.

Photographs courtesy of Special Collections, University of Nevada Las Vegas Library:
Manis Collection: page 49; page 50 (top); page 51 (right);
William J. Moore Collection: page 50 (bottom); page 51 (left).

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A

Anderson, Andy, 40
Arizona Club, 12-13

B

Baskin, Bob, 81
Bible, Alan, 73-74

C

Cahlan, Florence Lee, 6
Caribbean Hotel (Las Vegas),
58-60
Carrillo, Leo, 12-13
Caudill, Robert, 32-33, 40
Clark, Ed, 88-89
Coffman, Roscoe, 58
Connors, Helen, 43
Corgan, Jack, 5

D

Dairy ranch. See Hidden Valley
Ranch
Deming (New Mexico), 1-2
Desert Sea News Bureau, Las Vegas,
91-93, 95 (Note 2)
Diamond Valley (Nevada), 61-63,
67-68
Dilbeck, Mr. (architect), 1
Doby Doc. See Caudill, Robert
Dude ranch. See Hidden Valley Ranch

E

El Cortez Hotel (Las Vegas), 44,
81; stock and holders, 52-53
El Rancho Hotel (Gallup, New
Mexico), 1, 21
El Rancho Hotel (Las Vegas), 2-3,
21
Equitable Life Insurance Company,
58-59

F

First Western Savings and Loan,
62, 65, 68
Fletcher, Harry, 62, 63-64
Frogley, Ken, 95 (Note 2)
Frontier Hotel (Las Vegas),
41. See also Last Frontier
Hotel

G

Gaming industry, 69-79, 93-94;
in Florida, 93-94; in New Jersey,
93-94
Gibbs, Mr., 10-11
Green, Mr. (architect), 58-59
Griffith, Henry or H. J., 4
Griffith, Louis or L. C., 4
Griffith, R. E., 1-2, 3, 4, 11-
12, 19, 21

H

Ham, Art, 35, 55
Hannigan, Steve, 91-92, 95
(Note 2)
Hawkins's firm, 65
Hidden Valley Ranch, 28-32
Houssels, J. K., 53
Hull, Tom, 2, 3, 21, 58

K

Kaltenborn, Robert, 53
Kelch, Max, 82-84, 91
Kelly, Joe, 48-49
Kerkorian, Kirk, 22

L

Last Frontier Hotel (Las Vegas),
1, 3, 4-44, 53-54; air con-
ditioning, 5-6; Carrillo Room,
11-13; construction, 5, 6, 7-11;

entertainment, 19-22; fire protection, 6-7; furnishings, 5, 10-11, 12, 13-16, 23-27; Gay Nineties Bar, 13-15; gift shop, 15; laundry, 27-28; promotion, 19, 22-27, 80-82; Ramona Room, 10, 11; services, 16-17, 23-27
Last Frontier Village (Las Vegas), 32-41, 56; dress shop, 37-38; leather shop, 38; rock shop, 38; Silver Slipper, 34-37, 41; Texaco station, 38-41
Las Vegas Army Air Field. See Nellis Air Force Base
Las Vegas Valley Water District, 84-85
Little Church of the West, 41-44
Live Wire Fund, 86-90
Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, 85-86

M

McCarthy, Glen, 59
Miles, Mr., 46, 52
Miller, Abe, 87-88

N

Nellis Air Force Base, 8
Nevada Chamber of Commerce, 79, 81-93
Nevada Gaming Commission, 69, 77.
See also Nevada Tax Commission
Nevada Tax Commission, 69-78

O

Oil drilling, 57

P

Pair O' Dice Club, 12
Park William S., 55-56; Indian collection, 56
Parks, Wallace, 74-76
Pittman, Vail, 72-76
Polk, Harry, 55

Potato industry, 60-68
Promotion, 3-4, 17-19, 79-86, 93-94; hotel, 19, 22-27, 80-82; theater, 3-4, 17-19, 79-86, 93-94

R

Real estate development, 54-57
Rupert, A. R., 32

S

Searles, Kenny, 32
Securities Exchange Commission, 60
Showboat Hotel (Las Vegas), 44-45; acquisition of site, 44-48; stock and holders, 52-53
Siegel, Ben (Bugsy), 69-70
Soss, Fanny, 37
Studio designers, motion picture industry, 49-50

T

Texaco station, 39-40
Theater industry, 1, 2, 3-4, 17-19
Torginol Industries, 60-61, 64.
See also Western Industries Incorporated
Trailer Homes Investment Corporation, 55

U

Union Pacific Railroad, 84-85, 91-93, 95 (Note 2)
University of California at Davis, 66

W

War Production Board, 7-10, 28
Wengert, Cyril, 89-91
Westchester Gardens, 58, 64-65

Western Industries, Incorporated,
60-61, 63, 64-65, 67, 68-69.

See also Torginol Industries
Winnemucca (Nevada), 67-68
World War II, 7-10, 23-24, 28
Wycoff, Jerrie, 43

Z

Zick and Sharp, 39, 42-43

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